

THE FOOTLIGHTS FORE AND AFT

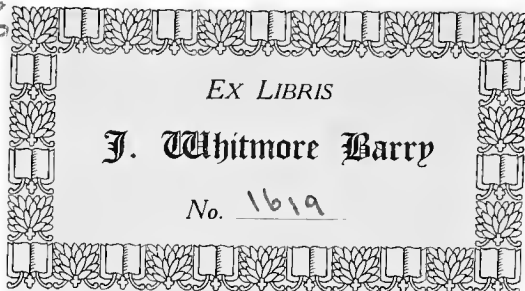


Channing Pollock

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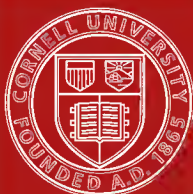
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*"Plays are put up in packages
and sold at the delicatessen shops"*

THE FOOTLIGHTS

FORE AND AFT

BY
CHANNING POLLOCK

WITH 50 FULL PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WARREN ROCKWELL



RICHARD G. BADGER

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TO THE LADY
WHO GOES TO THE THEATER WITH ME

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AN INTRODUCTION

Wherein, at union rates, the author performs the common but popular musical feat known as "blowing one's own horn."

"**G**OOD wine", according to the poet, "needs no bush." With the same logic, one may argue that a good book needs no introduction . . . But then—how be sure that it *is* a good book?

Hallowed custom provides that every volume of essays—especially of essays on the theater—shall begin with a preface in which some celebrated critic dilates upon the cleverness of the author. However, celebrated critics are expensive, and, moreover, no one else seems to know as much about the cleverness of this author as does the author himself. In consequence of which two facts, I mean to write my own introduction.

One obstacle appears to be well-nigh insurmountable. It will be easy to inform you as to

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my merits and my qualifications, but I don't quite see how a man can speak patronizingly of himself. And, of course, the patronizing tone is absolutely essential to an introduction. Nobody ever wrote an introduction without it. I shall do my best, but I hope you will be lenient with me in the event of failure.

“Of the making of books there is no end.”

And, even to the most enthusiastic student of the stage, it must seem that a sufficiently large number of these books deal with the theater.

At least, they deal with the drama—which is slightly different. It is in this difference that one finds some excuse for the appearance of “The Footlights—Fore and Aft.” Here are a collection of papers in which the reader finds no keen analysis of plays and players; no learned review of the past of the playhouse, no superior criticism of its present, no hyperbolic prophecy for its future. The book, in fact, is unique.

One might wish, indeed, that there were more substance to these essays, which reveal the

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impressions of a reporter rather than the ex-cogitations of a thinker or a philosopher. Mr. Pollock severely lets alone the drama of Greece and Rome. His field is the drama of Forty-second Street and Broadway. He has rendered unto Brander Matthews the things that are Brander Matthews', and unto William Winter the things that are William Winter's.

"The Footlights—Fore and Aft" contains nothing that might not have been set down by anyone with a sense of humor and the author's opportunities of observation. It is true that, in his case, these opportunities have been exceptional. Born in 1880, Mr. Pollock's contact with the theater began as early as 1896, when he became dramatic critic of the *The Washington Post*. Subsequently, he served in the same capacity with various newspapers and magazines, was reporter for a "trade journal" of "the profession", and acted, for a considerable period, as press agent and business manager. The practical side of play-making and play-producing he has learned in eight years' experience

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as a dramatist, during which time he has written ten dramatic pieces, among them "The Pit", "Clothes", "The Secret Orchard", "The Little Gray Lady", "In the Bishop's Carriage", and "Such a Little Queen."

Considering the narrow confines of the world he describes, its comparatively small population and its rather meager language, Mr. Pollock should not be blamed too much for a certain sameness throughout "The Footlights—Fore and Aft." There are not more than a dozen prominent managers and a score of well known playwrights in America; whoever elects to write a hundred thousand words about the theater must choose between mentioning these names repeatedly and inventing new ones. Nor is it possible to avoid the recurrence of explanations and instances. You will find something about stage lighting in "The Theater at a Glance", because it belongs there, and something more about it in "What Happens at Rehearsals", because much that follows in this account would not be clear without it. The author did not flatter

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himself that you would carry his first description with you through a hundred pages, and, perhaps, he didn't want you to spoil a nice book by thumbing back.

In articles written at various times for various readers, there is no reason to suppose that he devised two phrases where one would serve or searched for two examples where one would do the work. Undoubtedly, many of these reiterations were weeded out in the course of compilation, and, as undoubtedly, many of them remain. All collections of stories by the same author—especially when they treat of one subject—are marred by similarity. The remedy for this rests with the reader, who is recommended to take such books in small doses—say, one essay every night at bedtime.

Generally speaking, the matter that follows will not be found unpalatable. At least, the author gives us no reason to suspect that he is displeased with it or with himself. "The capital I's", as someone has said of another series of articles, "flash past like telegraph poles seen

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from a car window." Mr. Pollock scolds considerably, too, though, for the most part, in perfect good humor. Indeed, whatever their faults, it must be said that these essays display some wit, and a rather delightful lightness of touch and brightness of manner. They penetrate the recesses of the topic, giving an agreeable impression of confidence, of familiarity, and of authority.

Books and plays are judged by their price and pretence. With the price of this book neither the author nor the prefacer has anything to do. It pretends to very little, and, judged by that standard, it may be acquitted.

CHANNING POLLOCK.

The Parsonage, Shoreham, L. I.,

August 25, 1911.

THE FOOTLIGHTS

FORE AND AFT

I

THE THEATER AT A GLANCE

Being a correspondence school education in the business of the playhouse that should enable the veriest tyro to become a Charles Frohman or a David Belasco.

A MAN who passed as the possessor of reasonable intelligence—he “traveled for” a concern that manufactured canning machinery, and his knowledge of tins was something beautiful—once said to me: “Are plays written before they’re produced?”

“No,” I replied, indulging myself in a little sarcasm; “they’re put up in packages and sold at the delicatessen shops. Comedies cost twenty cents a box and dramas from twenty-five cents to half a dollar. It would be a great field for you, old chap, if you could induce a

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fellow like Augustus Thomas to pack his plays in cans."

Even my friend the "drummer" saw through that. I'm afraid my wit lacks subtlety. Still, two or three other people of my acquaintance would have been a bit uncertain whether to take me seriously or not. Most laymen, though they wouldn't believe in the package explanation, cherish a vague idea that theatrical presentations are miracles brought into being by the tap of the orchestra conductor's wand. Managers are quite willing to foster this opinion, agreeing with the late Fanny Davenport, who felt that the charm of the playhouse lay in its mystery, and that to elucidate would result in loss of patronage. In this verdict it is impossible for me to concur. I learn something new about the theater every day, and the more I learn the more I love it. You can't interest me in a thing of which I am ignorant—at least, not unless you start to clear up my ignorance.

Henry Arthur Jones, writing about "The Renaissance of the English Drama," observes:

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"I wish every playgoer could know all the tricks and illusions of the stage from beginning to end. I wish that he could be as learned in all the devices and scenic effects of the stage as the master carpenter. . . . Compare the noisy, ill-judged, misplaced applause of provincial audiences with the eager, unerring enthusiasm and appreciation of the audience at a professional matinee, where, so far as the acting goes, everyone knows the precise means by which an effect is produced, and, therefore, knows the precise reward it should receive." That's warrant enough for me.

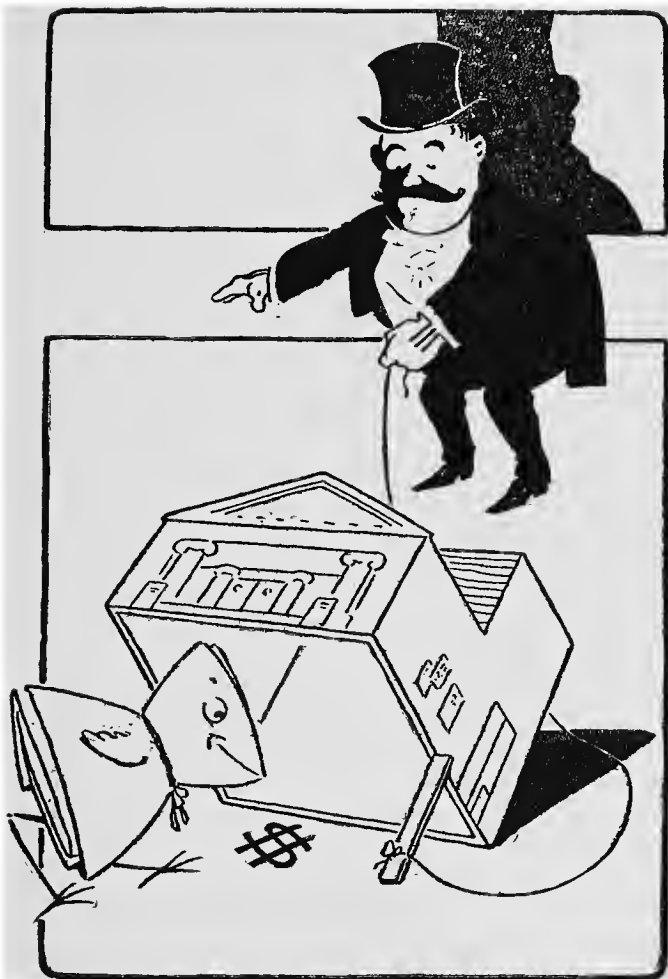
The theater is an extremely curious blending of art and business. Its art is lodged back of the curtain line and its business in front of the footlights. Between these two boundaries the manager stands when he is directing rehearsals, and, since his work is a mixture of both things, that four feet of cement constitutes a sort of intellectual no-man's-land. The people of the stage and the people in "the front of the house" have little in common, that little being chiefly

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a mutual feeling of contempt for each other.

You know the recipe for cooking a rabbit—"first catch your rabbit." The same recommendation applies in the matter of producing a play. Good plays are the one thing in the world, except money, the demand for which exceeds the supply. Consequently, dramatic works cost a trifle more than "twenty cents a box." Most managers think they cost altogether too much, but there never has been advanced a completely satisfactory reason why an illiterate little comedian should be paid more for appearing in a piece that makes him a success than the author should be paid for providing a piece that all the illiterate little comedians on earth couldn't make a success if the vehicle itself weren't attractive. . . . Kyrle Bellew in "The Thief" drew \$10,000 a week; Kyrle Bellew in "The Scandal" didn't draw \$4,000; that's the answer.

If you were a manager and wanted a play by a well-known author you would go to his agent—Elisabeth Marbury or Alice Kauser—and ask



"First catch your play"

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if he had time to write it. Should his reply be in the affirmative, you probably would pay him \$250 for attaching his name to a contract stipulating that the manuscript must be delivered on such and such a date. Before that time, he would send you a scenario, or brief synopsis, of his story. If you accepted that, you would give the author another \$250; if you rejected it, all would be over between you. The acceptance of the completed "script" would be likely to cost you an additional \$500, and the whole \$1,000 would be placed to your credit and deducted from the first royalties accruing to the dramatist.

Authors' royalties usually are on "a sliding scale." Such a one as we have in mind might get 5 per cent. of the first \$4,000 that came into the box office; 7 per cent. of the next \$3,000, and 10 per cent. of all in excess of that total. Thus, the playwright's income from a production that "did \$8,000" a week would be \$510. The agent would take 10 per cent. of this sum. Some dramatists receive better terms than these

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and some get worse; I have given the average. It is possible for an author to profit by such a property as "The Lion and the Mouse," which has been acted pretty constantly by two or more companies, to the extent of a quarter of a million dollars. Occasionally, a shrewd manager and an author without experience or self-confidence make a deal by which a play is sold outright. This is an unpleasant subject.

"How does the dramatist know the receipts of his play?" you ask. From a copy of the statement by which the manager knows. Did you ever hear of the operation called "counting up?" About an hour after the performance begins, the affable young man who takes your money through the box office window counts the tickets he has left, and subtracts the number of each kind from that which he had originally. The result is the number sold. That number is written on a report handed to the manager of the company appearing in the theater by which the young man is employed. He and the young man then count the sold tickets taken from the

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boxes into which you see them slipped when you give them to the official at the door. That result should be precisely the figure on the report. If it is greater the young man pays for the difference; if it is less nothing is said, since some people who bought tickets may have remained away. The statement of what has been disposed of, at what price, and with what total, is then signed jointly by the representative of the house and the representative of the company. Each keeps a copy of this statement and an additional copy is sent to the agent of the author. The transaction seems simple, but, if you will think the matter over, you will see that it is a nearly perfect method of preventing dishonesty.

The contract made between manager and author ordinarily provides that a play must be performed before a given date and so many times a year thereafter, in default of which all rights revert to the dramatist. One of the first requisites of a production now-a-days is scenery. Consequently, supposing still that you are the manager, you turn over your manuscript; act by

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act, to a scene painter, or to a number of scene painters, expressing your ideas on the subject, if you have any. The scene painter reads the play, formulates some ideas of his own, familiarizes himself with the time and place treated, and makes a model of each setting. The model is a miniature, usually on the scale of an inch to a foot, and it incorporates the necessities described by the author with the luxuries imagined by the manager. Moreover, it is as accurate and beautiful as skill can make it. If the producer approves of the model a bargain is struck, a builder constructs the frame work which is to hold the scenery, the painter covers the canvas, and, for a while, at least, the matter of settings is off your mind. The setting of an act may cost \$500 and it may cost \$5,000. Generally, it comes to about \$1,000.

In a play of modern life the actors are supposed to furnish their own costumes. Sometimes, when the dresses are to be exceptionally elaborate, this rule is varied. Should your property be a romantic drama or a comic opera,

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however, you have a conference with a costumer. The great producers, like the Shuberts and Klaw and Erlanger, maintain their own establishments, but this hardly will apply in your case. Now you will see costume plates instead of scene models—little paintings on card-board that frequently are exhibited in front of the theater in which the piece is running. These once passed upon, the contract for making the clothes will be let. Naturally, the cost is governed by the number of persons to be clad and by the nature of their garb. The gowns worn by one woman in the production of a Clyde Fitch society comedy came to \$3,100. The costumes for a comic opera may foot up \$20,000, irrespective of tights, stockings, slippers and gloves, which principals and chorus girls are obliged to find.

Engaging a company is a simple matter in comparison to what it used to be. A few years ago you would have been compelled to choose from thousands of applicants and to make personal visits to an actors' agency—say, Mrs.

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Packard's or Mrs. Fernandez'. Now metropolitan casts are composed chiefly of well known people. You have seen these people often, you know what they can do, you select them with an eye to round pegs and square holes, and you write to them or their representatives. In a week your cast is ready. Salaries range from \$400 a week, paid to a popular leading man or woman, to \$20 a week, the stipend of a player of bits. Chorus girls usually get \$18, though especially handsome "show girls" are worth as much as \$60. Your star probably insists on having from \$300 to \$500, and a percentage of the profits.

A stage manager is the man who does the thinking for actors. He directs rehearsals, devises "business" and effects, and often has a great deal more to do with the play than the author himself. Any author will tell you that this was true in the case of a failure; any stage manager will tell you it was true in the case of a success. In all seriousness, a stage manager is a mighty important individual. If actors



*"If actors roamed about at will
you couldn't tell a first night
performance from a football game"*

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roamed about at will in a play, as most laymen suppose they do, you couldn't tell a first night performance from a foot-ball game. Every actor in a piece knows just where he must stand when a certain line is spoken, and when, how, where and in what manner he must move to get in position for the next line. Smooth premieres are not accidents; they are designs. Sometimes, as in the case of David Belasco, producers are their own stage managers. Frequently, as with Charles Klein, authors stage their own plays. Almost always they have something to do with it.

The chorus of a musical comedy or a comic opera rehearses apart from the principals, and begins earlier. Putting on a piece like this is more difficult than putting on a legitimate comedy or a drama, and such a director as Julian Mitchell or R. H. Burnside may be paid \$15,000 a year. The production of a "straight play" often is piece work, bringing about \$500 for each piece. Costumes, scenery and properties are unknown until the last rehearsal.

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Two chairs represent a door or a sofa or a balcony in the minds of everyone concerned. "What is the woman doing on the bench?" I inquired once at a stock company rehearsal of "Mr. Barnes of New York."

"That isn't a bench," the manager replied. "That's a train of cars just leaving the railroad station at Milan."

While these things are going on in borrowed theaters or rented halls, two departments in your enterprise are preparing other details of the business. First, there is your booking agent. His task, like the matter of engaging a company, has been simplified. Formerly, he wrote to the manager of the theater you wanted in every city you wanted to play, and kept on writing until he had contracted for a route that would not involve your jaunting from Philadelphia to Chicago and then back to Baltimore on your way to St. Louis. Railway fares, even at two cents each per mile and one baggage car with every twenty-five tickets, eat up profits. Now-a-days your booking agent goes to the

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booking agent of one of the two big syndicates, each of which represents half of the theatres in the country, and that gentleman arranges a route while you wait. Sometimes it may not be a route worth waiting for, but that is determined by your importance and the estimated drawing power of your attraction. Theaters are "played on shares", the shares depending again upon the drawing power of your attraction and upon the size of the city booked. In Chicago you will get 50 per cent. of the receipts; in Newark 60 per cent; in Springfield or New Haven 70 per cent. A New York house keeps 50 per cent. and, unless your production seems promising, you will be obliged to guarantee that the theater's share will not fall below a certain figure.

Next, there is your press agent. He used to be a newspaper man, and he is worth \$100 a week or not more than a dollar and a quarter. In his office is a stenographer, a mimeographing machine, and a list of six hundred daily newspapers. If he is worth \$100 he knows

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just what each of those newspapers will print and what it will not. It is his business to cover a pound of advertising so completely with an ounce of news that the whole parcel will not be consigned to the waste-basket. Out in Milwaukee and over in Boston you have observed journalistic items like these:

Augustus Thomas is at work on a new play for Charles Frohman. The piece is to be called "The Jew," and will be produced in September.

That's the press agent!

He also designs bills, gets up circulars, sends out photographs, invents "fake stories", and takes the blame for whatever happens that shouldn't have happened. If you have several attractions you will need a press agent in New York and one with each company on the road. In the parlance of the profession, the road press agent is "the man ahead of the show," while the acting manager is "the man back with the

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show." The terms are self-explanatory. "The man back with the show" keeps the books, "counts up," pays salaries, "jollies" the star, and maintains communication with his principal. During the course of your connection with the theatrical business you will have dealings also with the advertising agent, who supervises the posting of bills; the transfer companies, which haul your production to and from playhouses and railway stations; and scores of other people. You must learn about them from experience.

The stage is a land of wonders the geography of which must be pretty thoroughly understood before you can receive any idea as to the working of the miracles that occur in the ten minutes the curtain is down between acts. Of course, you know that the opening through which you witness the performance of a play is called the proscenium arch. The space between the base of this arch and the footlights is known as the "apron." That region into which you have seen canvas disappear when it is

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hauled up from the stage is the "flies." Directly under the roof is a floor or iron grating from which are suspended the pulleys that bear the weight of this "hanging stuff," and that floor, for obvious reasons, is called the "gridiron." The little balcony fastened to the wall at one side of the stage or another is the "fly gallery." The loose ends of the ropes attached to the "hanging stuff" are fastened here, and it is from this elevation that the "stuff" aforesaid is lifted and lowered. Scenery is of two kinds—"drops" and "flats." Of the latter more anon. "Drops" are curtains of any sort on which are painted the reproductions of exteriors or interiors, and one of the ordinary size weighs about two hundred pounds. In common with everything else suspended in the "flies," these "drops" are counterweighted, so that a couple of men can move them with ease. The other things suspended may be "flies," or "borders," which are painted strips that prevent your seeing any farther up than you are expected to see; "ceiling pieces," platforms, and "border lights," which are tin

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tubes as long as the stage is wide, open at the bottom, and filled with incandescent globes of various colors for illuminating from above.

"Flats" are pieces of painted canvas tacked on a framework of wood. In the old days these were held in position by "grooves," or combinations of little inverted troughs that fitted over the tops of the "flats." These "grooves" were in sets four or five feet apart running along both sides of the stage, and their position gave to various parts of that platform designations that are used still in giving directions in play manuscripts. Thus, "L.2.E.," or "Left second entrance," is the space between the first and second of these sets on the left of the stage. The long "flats," slid in to join in the center and make the rear wall of a dwelling, for example, constituted "*the* flat" and the short ones on your right or left were "wings." Then a room could be no other shape than square or oblong, and the doors and windows had to be in certain specified places, no matter where they would have been in a real house. It is laughable now

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to consider how this purely physical condition limited the dramatist.

At the present time the building of a house with "flats" is not unlike building one with cards. Each "flat" is placed where it is desired and held up from behind by a "brace," one end of which is screwed to the setting and the other to the floor. That particular "flat" is then lashed to its neighbors with a "tab line," much as you lace your shoes. When the walls have been constructed in this way, with doors and windows wherever they are wanted, a ceiling is lowered from the "fly gallery," and the dwelling is complete. If you are supposed to see a landscape through the window, a "drop" on which a landscape has been painted is lowered t'other side of the rear wall. An "interior backing," representing the wall of another room, usually is in the form of a large screen standing behind the door where it is needed. Corners of this kind are illuminated by "strip lights," or electric lamps placed on a strip of wood and hung in place.

THE THEATER AT A GLANCE

Stage lighting has undergone a complete revolution in the past few years, the step from incandescent lamps to calciums meaning even more than the step from gas to electric lamps. Formerly, the illumination came from the foot-lights and the "borders" exclusively; the sun rose and set directly over-head in open defiance of the Copernican theory. Now the stage is full of miniature trap doors, and to the metal beneath these may be attached wires that will throw light from anywhere. There is a "bridge" in the "first entrance" on the "prompt side" on which sits a man with apparatus to reproduce almost any effect known to Nature. You have seen the busy and important individual who controls "lamps" in the dress circle or the gallery, and without doubt you have observed that nowadays there is very little to keep such a stage manager as David Belasco from doing whatever he pleases with his electricity.

There are five classes of men at work on the stage, all under the direct supervision of the master carpenter. The men in these classes are

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known as "flymen," "grips," "clearers," "property men" and electricians. Each of these has his own labor to accomplish, and goes at it without loss of time or regard to the others. The "flymen" haul up and lower whatever hangs in the "flies." The "grips" attend to any scenery that must be set up or pulled down. The "clearers" take away the furniture and accessories that have been used, and the "property men" substitute other furniture and accessories from the "property room." The work of the electricians has been explained. In these days of elaborate calcium effects, there must be a man at each "lamp."

All these matters are attended to as though by machinery. When the curtain has fallen on the star's last bow, the stage manager cries "Strike!" This cry means labor trouble of a very different sort from that usually created by a call to strike. The stage immediately becomes a small pandemonium. The crew in the "fly gallery" works like the crew on a yard arm during a yacht race, hauling wildly at a greater

THE THEATER AT A GLANCE

number of ropes than were ever on a ship. In consequence of their energy, trees and houses soar into the air as though by magic. Samson wasn't such a giant, after all. He only pulled down a building—these fellows pull buildings *up*!

They are not mightier, however, than their colleagues, the "grips." There walks a stalwart individual carrying a folded balcony or pushing along the whole side of a church. Another permits a porch to collapse and fall into his out-stretched arms. How useful these "grips" would have been in San Francisco! Meanwhile, the "clearers" and "property men" have been mixing things up in great shape. The last act was an interior; the next is to be an exterior. Consequently, you note a fine spot of lawn growing directly under a horsehair sofa and the trunk of a huge oak reclining affectionately against a chest of drawers. Gradually, the signs of indoor life disappear, and then, suddenly, springing out of absolute chaos, you see a forest or a broad public square. The "lamps"

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sputter a moment and blaze up, bathing the scene in the warm red of sunset or the pale blue of moonlight. "Second act!" screams the call-boy, running from dressing room door to dressing room door. The stage manager presses a button connected with a signal light in front of the orchestra conductor, and you hear the purr of the incidental music. He presses another button once—twice. "Buzz!" hisses something in the "fly-gallery," and "buzz!" again. The curtain lifts and the play is continued. Everything has been done in perfect order. Even now the stage manager stands in the "first entrance," pencil in hand, noting the exact moment at which the act began, the minute at which each song was sung, and how many encores it received. You—my friend, the manager—will get that report to-morrow morning.

Here, omitting a dictionary of details, you have the theater at a glance. I feel tempted, like the magician after he has garbled some explanation of a difficult trick, to say: "Now, ladies and gentlemen, you can go home and do



*"A stalwart individual pushing
along the side of a church"*

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it yourselves." But you can't. I couldn't. The thousands of important trifles, the thousands of quick decisions that must be made and of clever things that must be done—these are the results of genius and work and of long, long experience. Many an American who has "French at a Glance" on the tips of his fingers, so to speak, has to cackle in imitation of a hen when he wants to get a soft-boiled egg in Paris.

SOME PEOPLE I'VE LIED ABOUT

Being reminiscences of the author's nefarious, but more or less innocuous career as a press agent.

A PRESS agent, as you may have gathered from the preceding article, is a person employed to obtain free newspaper advertising for any given thing, and the thing usually is a theatrical production. This advertising he is supposed to get as the Quaker was advised to get money—honestly, if possible. Since it isn't often possible, the press agent may be described in two words as a professional liar.

There is neither malice nor "muck rake " in this assertion. The press agent knows that his business is the dissemination of falsehood, and he is proud of it. Go up to any member of the craft you find on Broadway and say to him: "You are a liar!"; you will see a smile of satisfaction spread itself over his happy face, and his horny hand will grasp yours in earnest grati-

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tude. Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray were liars, too, according to his way of thinking, and not overly ingenious or entertaining liars, at that. Their fiction was spread upon the pages of books, as his is spread upon the pages of the daily journals, and their mission, like his, was the enlivening of a terribly dull little planet. This altruistic motive really lurks behind the prevarications of the press agent with imagination. He conceives his philanthropic duty to be the making of news to fill a demand largely in excess of the supply. If the pursuit of this purpose brings him an income hovering about that of a United States Senator he cannot be blamed.

I became one of the guild of Annanias some ten or eleven years ago, coming fresh from the position of dramatic critic on *The Washington Times*, and I think I may say without undue egotism that, during the period of my membership, I lied industriously, conscientiously and with a fair degree of success. There have been and are more able falsifiers than I, but the con-

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fessions of one man cannot in honor include the deeds of another, and so I must omit them from this chronicle. Suffice it to say that the stories of Anna Held's bathing in milk, of Mrs. Patrick Campbell having tan bark spread in the street in front of the Theater Republic to deaden the rumbling that annoyed her during performances, and a score similar in nature remain conspicuous examples of the cleverness manifested by brilliant press agents in attracting attention to the actors and actresses in whose behalf they labored.

The successful launching of a "fake"—so they are known to the profession—like these is not at all the simple matter it would appear to be. The mere conception of the story is only the beginning of the task. It is not enough to decide that such and such a thing might happen, or to swear that it has happened; it must be made to happen. Moreover, the occurrence must be so natural, and the plans leading to it so carefully laid and concealed, as to prevent suspicion and baffle investigation. Whenever



"The guild of Annanias"

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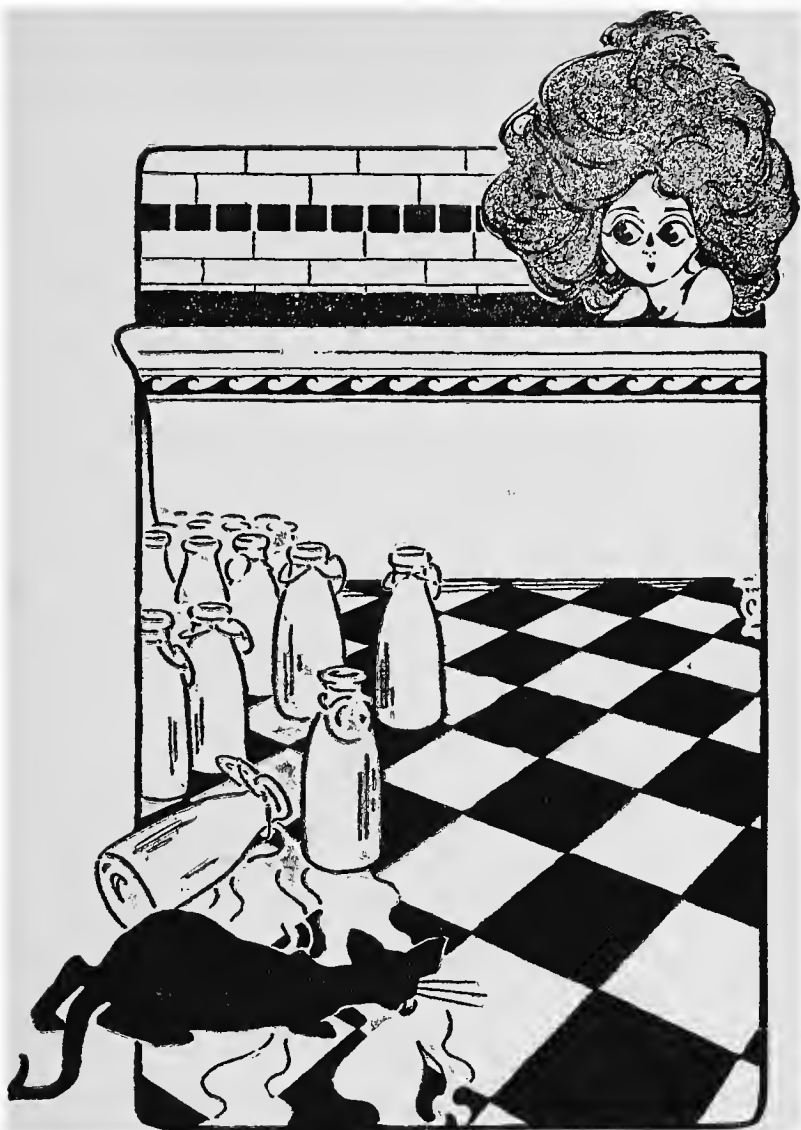
it is possible, the press agent should be ostensibly unconnected with the affair, and, whenever it is not, he must hide his knowledge behind a mask of innocence in comparison with which the face of Mary's little lamb looks like a selection from the rogues' gallery.

There are other requisites to the spinning of a yarn which shall be valuable in an advertising way. In the first place, it is necessary that the story shall not injure the reputation or lower the standing of its hero or heroine, and equally desirable that it shall have no "come back" that may make enemies for the press agent. The announcement that Mrs. Patrick Campbell had won a large sum from society women at bridge whist, made during an engagement of the star in New York, was given all kinds of space in the newspapers, but it brought down upon Mrs. Campbell's devoted head such scathing denunciation from press and pulpit that she lost no time in sending out a denial. The publicity given the matrimonial enterprises of De Wolf Hopper, through no fault of his

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advertising staff, seriously injured that capable comedian for a time. A good "fake" is bizarre and picturesque enough to be interesting, will defy the prober after truth, hurts no one and so creates no journalistic grudges to be fought down in the future. There must be no limit to the number of times that the press agent can stir up excitement when he calls "Wolf!"

So many of the stories invented by theatrical Munchausens possess the qualification first mentioned that it is by no means unusual for the inventor to take the newspaper man into his confidence. Of course, before doing this he wants to feel sure of his newspaper and of his man. Dailies there be that prefer fact to fiction, however prosaic the former; that treat the stage in so dignified a manner that, if the Empire Theater burned to the ground, they probably would print the information under a head reading "The Drama"; that scorn the press agent and have only contempt for his handiwork. The most rabid of these, strangely enough, is the very paper that once, for its own



"Anna Held's bathing in milk"

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amusement, tried a "fake" about wild animals escaping from Central Park Zoo which succeeded so well that for twenty-four hours business was practically suspended in New York. At least half the journals in town do not inquire too closely into a tale that is likely to appeal to their readers, especially if the tale in question is obviously harmless. When the publicity promoter conceals his machinations and buries clues leading to his connection with a story—"and the same with intent to deceive"—he must plot with great care, for woe betide him if the truth leaks out.

An excellent example of the kind of "fake" in accomplishing which one may rely upon the co-operation of the Fourth Estate is the incident of Margaret Mayo writing a play in twenty-four hours. Miss Mayo, who since then has written many plays, notably "Baby Mine" and "Polly of the Circus," at that time was appearing with Grace George in "Pretty Peggy" at the Herald Square Theater. The season had been dull, if profitable, and I was casting about

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for any item likely to get into print, when the idea of having someone go Paul Armstrong two better in rapidity of accomplishment occurred to me. Obviously, it was impossible to involve Miss George in the episode without making her appear ridiculous, and so I cast about for a likely member of her company.

Miss Mayo's name suggested itself to me because of the fact that, even then, she was at work on several plays, and I obtained her consent to my plan. Shortly afterward it was announced from the Herald Square that Miss Mayo had wagered a supper with Theodore Burt Sayre, author of numerous well known dramas, that she could begin and complete a four act comedy in the space of a single day. The test was to be made on the following Sunday at the residence of Miss Mayo, who was to have the benefit of a stenographer, and, to guard against her using an idea previously worked out, the advantage of a synopsis furnished by Mr. Sayre. This synopsis was to be delivered in a sealed envelope at six o'clock one

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morning and the play was to be finished at six o'clock the next. Mr. Sayre, an intimate personal friend, had been furnished with these details over the telephone, and affirmed them when called up by the reporters. Our announcement was printed by nearly every newspaper in town.

The stenographer provided Miss Mayo on that eventful morning was my own—a bright, quick-witted Irish girl, whose name, unfortunately, I have forgotten. The synopsis of the play was Miss Mayo's. She had it made from an old piece of her own, which had been freshly typed a day or two before. Saturday night, sheets from this manuscript were generously distributed about the room, the remaining sheets were hidden in a bureau drawer, the typewriter was put in position, and our scenery was ready. Business took me to Philadelphia on a late train, and the beginning of our two little comedies—that to be written and that to be acted—was entrusted to Miss Mayo.

I got back from the Quaker City shortly after noon on Sunday and went direct to the

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scene of action. I rang the front bell, the door opened automatically, and I climbed the stairs to the apartment. From the hall I heard a nervous voice and the click of a typewriter. Somebody admitted me and mine eyes beheld as excellent a counterfeit of fevered energy as it has ever been their luck to fall upon. Miss Mayo was pacing the floor wildly, dictating at least sixty words a minute, while the stenographer bent quiveringly over her machine. That portion of a manuscript which Arthur Wing Pinero might possibly prepare in six months lay on the table. The typist broke the charm. "Why!" she exclaimed; "it's Mr. Pollock!"

"Oh!" said Miss Mayo. "I thought you were a newspaper man. Sit down and have a biscuit."

This pretence was continued all day. When reporters came we struggled with the difficulties of rapid-fire composition; when they didn't we ate biscuits and manifolded epigrams which afterwards were sent to waiting city editors and quoted as being from the twenty-four hour play.

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Miss Mayo was photographed several times and we had a delicious dinner at six. Afterward, we named our product "The Mart" and separated for the night. Despite our thin histrionism, there wasn't a newspaper man among our visitors who didn't know in his secret soul that the whole thing had been cooked up for advertising purposes, yet, a newsless Sunday aiding and abetting us, we had more space the next morning than might have been devoted to the outbreak of a revolution in France.

Similarly, no intelligent person could have questioned for a moment the purpose of the matinee which De Wolf Hopper gave "for women only" soon afterward at the Casino Theater. "Happyland," the opera in which Mr. Hopper was appearing, made no especial appeal to the gentler sex, while the presenting company included so many pretty girls that a performance "for men only" would have been infinitely more reasonable. As a matter of fact, I first conceived the idea in this form, but swerved from my course upon taking into ac-

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count two important considerations. The announcement of an entertainment "for men only" must have created the impression that there was something objectionable about the presentation—an impression we were extremely anxious to avoid—and it would not have given the opportunities for humorous writing which we hoped would serve as bait to the reporters. Foreseeing that upon the obviousness of these opportunities would depend the amount of attention paid to so palpable an advertising scheme, we took care to guard against a dearth of incident by providing our own happenings. Among the number of these were the entrance of a youth who had disguised himself as a girl in order to gain admittance, the appearance of a husband who insisted that his wife must not remain at a performance from which he was barred, and one or two similar episodes. We found, in the end, that these devices were superfluous. On the afternoon selected, the interior of the Casino fairly grinned with femininity, the audience looked like a Mormon mass meeting multiplied

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by two, and even so dignified and important a news-gathering service as the Associated Press condescended to take facetious notice of the "Women's Matinee."

If you recollect what you read in newspapers, it is not at all impossible that, even at this date, you will find something familiar about the name of Marion Alexander. You don't? Perhaps your memory can be assisted. Miss Alexander was the chorus girl supporting Lillian Russell in "Lady Teazle" who sued the late Sam S. Shubert for \$10,000 because he had said she was not beautiful. The story of this slander and of the resentment it provoked went all around the world, though it is unlikely that anyone who printed it was deceived as to the genuineness of the lady's fine frenzy. The Marion Alexander tale had all the journalistic attractions of the "Women's Matinee," in that it was unique and admitted of breeziness in narration, but it had in addition an advantage that no press agent overlooks—it was susceptible to illustration. Newspapers always are eager to

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print pictures of pretty women. The average New York journal had rather reproduce a stunning photograph of Trixie Twinkletoes than the most dignified portrait of Ellen Terry or Ada Rehan. Miss Alexander *was* pretty—I haven't the least doubt that she still is—and, while this story was running its course, the Shuberts paid nearly \$300 for photographs used by daily papers, weekly papers, periodicals, magazines and news syndicates.

In the course of the controversy Miss Russell took occasion to side with Mr. Shubert—she didn't know she had done so until she read her paper the next morning—and ventured the opinion that no brunette could possibly be beautiful. As had been expected, this statement aroused a storm of protest. There are a million brunettes in New York, and to say that we succeeded in interesting them is putting it mildly. When "Lady Teazle" departed for the road they were still writing indignant letters to *The American and Journal*, and nearly every letter gave added prominence to Miss Russell.

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I wrote a few indignant letters myself and had them copied in long hand by the telephone girls and stenographers in the building. It is quite needless to say that Miss Alexander's suit never came to trial.

Twice during my career of prevarication, managing editors became interested in my humble efforts at the creation of news and demanded proofs that were not easily manufactured. While "Fantana" was running at the Lyric Theater, I discovered a chorus girl whose dog wore an exquisite pair of diamond ear-rings. To be quite accurate, neither the chorus girl nor the dog had thought of any such adornment when we three became acquainted, but a ten cent pair of jewels stuck to the animal's head with chewing gum and the popular belief that "the camera does not lie" were expected to make the discovery seem convincing. An iconoclast on *The World* made it necessary for us to borrow ear rings from Tiffany's and bore holes in the flesh of a poor little canine that might never have known what suffering was but for the

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shocking skepticism mentioned.

If the beast in this case was martyred in the interest of science—the science of advertising—the staff of the press department at the Lyric had its share of agony a little later on. We had sent out ingenuously a trifling story about what we were pleased to call a “chorus girls’ rogues gallery”, detailing the manner in which the records of the young women were kept on the backs of photographs filed away in a room arranged for that purpose. *The World* wanted the tale verified and inquired blandly if it might send up a reporter to inspect. We replied with equal politeness that it might—the next day. That afternoon we bought a rubber stamp and nearly a thousand old pictures, and all night long six of us worked on a “chorus girls’ rogues’ gallery” that would live up to its reputation. Our reward was a page in colors.

Sometimes things really do happen to actors and actresses, and so, not infrequently, there is a grain of truth in the news printed about them. Only a grain, mind you, for if a tenth of the



*"Sometimes things really
do happen to actors"*

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events in which they are supposed to take part were actual, the inevitable end of life on the stage would be death of nervous prostration. The wide-awake press agent is quick to plant the grain of truth aforesaid, growing therefrom stories no more like the originals than a radish is like a radish seed. Grace George once telegraphed me to Chicago that she would not open at the Grand Opera House in "Pretty Peggy" on a Sunday. She felt, quite rightly, that eight performances a week was the limit of her endurance. Staring at a pile of printed bills announcing an engagement beginning on the Sabbath, I concluded that this ultimatum had reached the limit of mine. Then an inspiration. Up went the original bills, to be covered a day later with others advertising the first performance for Monday. The newspapers were curious as to why the change had been made and we were willing, not to say eager, to satisfy their curiosity. Miss George did not believe in giving theatrical performances on Sunday. At least a dozen clerygmen read this and told their con-

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gregations about it the day before the postponed advent of "Pretty Peggy."

Caught in a blizzard at Oswego, N. Y., eight years ago, I was informed that the only chance of my joining Miss George that night at Syracuse lay in making the trip in a special locomotive. That necessity got printed throughout the country a vivid description of Miss George driving an engine through banks of snow in order to reach Syracuse for her performance of "Under Southern Skies." The woman who actually made the trip was a waitress from an Oswego hotel and she received \$10 for it.

William A. Brady wanted a thousand girls in September, 1902, for his Woman's Exhibition at Madison Square Garden. They could have been obtained without the knowledge of the police, but secrecy was not the *desideratum*. "Wanted—1000 Women at Madison Square Garden at 8 P. M. on Friday" was an advertisement which brought down upon us nearly thrice that number, together with a small army of

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newspaper reporters and photographers. This was the first gun fired in a campaign of advertising for a show during the existence of which we obtained nearly six hundred columns of space in New York.

Truth is never important in a press agent's story, and there are some occurrences that he actually suppresses. Accounts of small fires, accidents, thefts and quarrels do not get into type if he can help it. Several kinds of news items have been "faked" so often that no one would attempt to have them mentioned journalistically should examples of their class really happen. He would be a brave publicity promoter, for instance, who sent to an editor the tale of his star stopping a runaway, no matter how firmly the tale might be based on fact. Miss George had stolen from her a valuable diamond necklace while she was playing in "Pretty Peggy" and knew better than to permit my sending out an announcement of the theft. "An Actress Loses Her Diamonds!" You laugh scornfully at the very idea. The pa-

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pers no longer publish accounts of people standing in line before box offices all night in order to secure good seats in the morning, though I succeeded in obtaining mention of this feature of Sarah Bernhardt's last engagement but one in New York by injecting into the yarn a few drops of what theatrical managers call "heart interest." Five dollars and a little careful coaching secured for me a picturesque looking old woman who convinced her inquisitors that she once had acted with the Divine Sarah in Paris. Her vigil in the lobby of the Lyric received more attention than did the *bona fide* line of three thousand persons that I rose at five to have photographed on the morning following.

This imposter's husband afterward figured at the Casino in the role of a man whose visit to "Happyland" was the first he had made to a theater since the night on which he had witnessed the shooting of Abraham Lincoln. The tale we told was that this spectacle had so affected him that the soothing influence of forty years was required to bring him again into the pre-

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cincts of a playhouse. Interviewed by the representatives of several journals, he made a comparison between theatrical performances of ante bellum times and those of today that could hardly have been more convincing had my confederate's price not included two seats for the preceding evening at another place of amusement under direction of the Shuberts. This story, which went the rounds of the country, cost, all in all, ten minutes work and three silver dollars. I mention it as an instance of the simple "fake" that sometimes proves most effective.

An equally simple story, used almost simultaneously, came near being less inexpensive. Henry Miller was about to produce "Grier-son's Way" at the Princess Theater, and, rehearsals not progressing to his satisfaction, he determined to postpone the scheduled date of opening. This determination we resolved upon turning to our own account. We advertised widely that Mr. Miller had lost the only existing manuscript of the play, without which

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the performance could not be given, and that he would pay \$500 reward for its restoration. Two days afterward Mr. Miller called me up on the telephone. "An awful thing has happened!" he said. "I've actually lost a manuscript of 'Grierson's Way.'"

"What of it?" I inquired.

"What of it!" echoed Mr. Miller. "Supposing somebody brings the 'script to me and demands that \$500?"

Fortunately, "Grierson's Way" was found by a stage hand who was satisfied with a small bill and an explanation.

It seems hardly probable that anyone will recall how a barber once delayed the beginning of a performance of "Taps" until half past eight o'clock, yet that tale was one of the most successful of simple stories. The only preparation required was posting the chosen tonsorialist and holding the curtain at the Lyric. Herbert Kelcey, according to the explanation given out, had been shaved when he discovered that he did not have the usual fee about him. "I'll

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pay you tomorrow," he had remarked. "I'm Herbert Kelcey."

"Herbert Kelcey nuttin'!" his creditor had replied. "Dat gag don't go! You stay here until you get dat fifteen cents!"

A messenger, hastily summoned, was said to have released the actor shortly after the hour for "ringing up." The idea that a barber could keep a thousand people waiting for their entertainment was both novel and humorous, and, in the vernacular, our story "landed hard." The strike of the Helen May Butler Military Band at the Woman's Exhibition was arranged with equal ease and proved equally good. That exhibition was wonderfully fruitful. Almost anything the women did seemed amusing, and the show itself was so extraordinary that its smallest features were interesting.

As elaborate a tale as, for example, the famous Anna Held milk bath story, to which I have referred, requires more plotting and arranging than would the founding of a revolutionary society in Russia. One may spend

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weeks of work and hundreds of dollars on such a "fake," only to trace its subsequent failure to some trifling flaw in the chain of circumstance. Widely though a successful story of this sort may be chronicled, the reward is absolutely incommensurate with the labor involved, and I think few press agents would ever attempt one were it not for a gambler's love of excitement.

It was during Judge Alton B. Parker's presidential campaign that I evolved what I consider my most magnificent "fake." At that time I represented several attractions in New York, chief among the number two musical comedies, entitled "The Royal Chef" and "Piff, Paff, Pouf." I wired Judge Parker's secretary that the choruses of these productions had formed a club, which was to be known as The Theatrical Women's Parker Association, and the purpose of which was to induce male performers to go home to vote. Would Judge Parker receive a delegation from this society? The wire was signed "Nena Blake," and, in due time, Miss Blake received a courteous and

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conclusive reply. Judge Parker would not.

That message was a stunner. In the face of it, there was only one thing to do—send along our delegation on the pretence that no answer to our communication had ever been received. Nine chorus ladies were picked out in a hurry, placed in charge of a shrewd newspaper woman who passed as another show girl, and the whole outfit was dispatched to Aesopus. The newspaper woman had instructions to register at a prominent hotel as a delegation from the Theatrical Women's Parker Association, and to parade herself and her charges before all the alert correspondents in the little town on the Hudson. That done, we who had stayed behind got ready photographs of the pilgrims and waited.

The wait was not long. By nine o'clock that night the bait had been swallowed at Aesopus, and my office was crowded with reporters anxious to verify the story wired from up the river. Judge Parker, with characteristic kindness, had lunched the party, allowed it to sing to him,

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and sent it away rejoicing. Most of the boys "smelled a mouse," but the thing was undeniably true and much too important to be ignored. The Theatrical Women's Parker Club, "Piff, Paff, Pouf" and "The Royal Chef" were well advertised the next morning.

It was the failure of a prominent newspaper to mention either of our plays by name that drove me to further utilization of this scheme. Such an omission is always unfair and unjust. A story is good enough to be printed or it is not; if not, nobody has cause for complaint, if it is, there is no reason why a newspaper should deny the expected compensation. Resolving that I would compel this payment, I immediately arranged for a public meeting of the Theatrical Women's Parker Club. The Democratic National Committee furnished us with a cart-load of campaign literature and with three speakers, one of whom was Senator Charles A. Towne. The other orators we provided. They were Eddie Foy, Dave Lewis, Nena Blake, Grace Cameron and Amelia Stone. The juxtaposi-



*"A public meeting of The
Theatrical Women's Parker Club"*

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tion, I felt confident, was sufficiently grotesque to provoke comment.

I wrote nine political speeches for the occasion, held two rehearsals, and, when our advertisements failed to draw an audience, secured a fine one by sending to such congregating places as the Actors' Society. The affair passed off beautifully, Senator Towne adapting himself to circumstances and making one of the most graceful and agreeable addresses imaginable. I heard it from a nook in the fly gallery, where I remained until the meeting was adjourned. This "fake" accomplished its purpose, the delinquent newspaper falling in line with the others in publishing the story.

It would tax your patience and your faith in the existence of modesty were I to go into detail regarding a score of similar "fakes" which come to mind. How this same Nena Blake was kidnapped from the Garrick Theater, Chicago, and sent to New York in the costume she wore in "The Royal Chef"; how her sister, Bertha, was sent to Zion to kiss the unkissed son of

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John Alexander Dowie; how a supposed German baron threw across the footlights to Julia Sanderson a bouquet from which dropped an \$18,000 diamond necklace; how a chorus girl named Thorne created a sensation at a Physical Culture Show in Madison Square Garden by declaring the costume she was expected to wear "shockingly immodest"; how a niece of Adele Ritchie changed her name to Adele Ritchie Jr., and Miss Ritchie herself was sought in marriage by a Siamese millionaire—all of these anecdotes must pass with the mere mention that they were successful "fakes."

The manner in which a good story may go wrong merits more extended description. While an extravaganza, yclept "The Babes and the Baron", was in town, I resolved upon a news event so complicated that I wonder now at my temerity in undertaking it. The idea was that some well known doctor should find on his doorstep one morning a young and pretty girl, fashionably dressed and intelligent-looking, but quite unable to recall her name or to give an account

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of herself. The doctor, naturally enough, would report the affair to the police, who, in turn, would give it to the reporters. These gentlemen, deceived by the fact that no possible advertising could be suspected in the case of a woman who looked untheatrical and who did not even know her own name, were expected to give untold space in the evening papers to the mystery. After the journals in question had been published, the girl was to be identified, so that her name and that of "The Babes and the Baron" might be printed in the morning.

It was necessary that, at this time, the victim should be able to give a good reason for her condition. The reason selected was as follows: During the performance of the extravaganza, some question had arisen as to the young woman's courage or cowardice. To prove the former, she had volunteered to hide in the Eden Musee and to remain all night in the "chamber of horrors." The terrible sights of this place had frightened her into hysteria; the porter, hearing her scream and believing her to be in-

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toxicated, had ejected her; a kindly old gentleman had found her in the street and started to drive her to a hospital, when, becoming alarmed, he had decided instead to place her on the doorstep of a physician's house, ring the bell, and get away.

Anyone will tell you that the first essential to having roast goose for dinner is to get your goose. At least twenty chorus girls must have been interrogated before I found one willing and competent to try the experiment. Mabel Wilbur, afterward prima donna of "The Merry Widow", was chosen, and she spent eleven days being instructed in the symptoms of the mental disease known as asphasia. The officials of the Eden Musee, glad to share the advertising, carefully coached the porter in the story he was to tell. The stage manager of "The Babes and the Baron" was admitted into the secret and a bright journalist was engaged to hover about and superintend affairs. Of course, my appearance in the neighborhood of the sickroom would have been fatal to the

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"fake."

Miss Wilbur was left on the doctor's doorstep shortly after four o'clock one mild morning. From that time until night the scheme worked like a charm. Miss Wilbur, bravely enduring all sorts of physical and mental tests, passed the scrutiny of a dozen detectives and medical men. After vainly buying a dozen editions of the evening papers in an anxious effort to learn how matters were progressing, I suddenly found the journals filled with the affair. "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab—Pretty Girl Left on Doctor's Doorstep in Dying Condition" and "Police Have New Problem" were headlines that flared across front pages. Up to that point the story had been a huge success. There remained only the matter of identification to connect with the other story, like two ends of a tunnel meeting, and this promised to be a delicate matter. Say "chorus girl" to a newspaper man and he immediately becomes suspicious. Our hardest work was before us.

At nine o'clock the stage manager of "The

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Babes and the Baron" was sent around to recognize Miss Wilbur. It was he who had challenged her courage, and, alarmed at her failure to report for the performance, he had hastened to pick up the clue given him by the evening papers. Miss Wilbur's identity was established in the presence of a score of reporters and photographers, none of whom seemed to suspect anything. "At the hour of going to press" we all felt certain that we had "pulled off" the biggest theatrical "fake" known to history.

Every paper in town had the story the next morning—but it was the true story. A City News Association man had recognized my bright journalist, at that time passing himself off as a brother of Miss Wilbur, and the net result of our fortnight's toiling and moiling was some six columns of ridicule.

These confessions would be incomplete if I did not admit here and now that this story was the most ill-advised of my career. It brought discomfit and discredit to a dozen persons, it involved an attempt to deceive some of my best

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friends, and it put me in a bad light at the very time that the approaching premiere of a play from my pen made that most undesirable. A great many city editors have never forgiven me my part in this particular "fake," although the owner of an evening paper wrote me the next day: "I was fooled from first to last. You're a wonder. Congratulations."

Another bad mistake was my story regarding the willingness of the management to pay \$50 a week for exceptionally beautiful chorus girls to appear in "Mexicana." The story was printed all over the world, but it caused critics to stamp as ugly one of the most attractive ensembles ever brought to New York. "If any of these girls," said *The Sun*, "gets \$50 a week her employers are entitled to a rebate." I cannot place in the same catalogue Madame Bernhardt's appeal to the French Ambassador at Washington to protest against her exclusion from playhouses controlled by the so-called Theatrical Syndicate. Madame denied this over her own signature, but, from a press

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agent's point of view, it was an exceedingly creditable falsehood.

It is possible to discuss at endless length the real value of the "fake" and its place in theatrical advertising. Perhaps no one ever went to a theater merely because one of the performers at that theater was supposed to have bathed in milk or to have stopped a runaway horse. On the other hand, I am sure that no one ever went to a theater because he or she had seen the name of the play acted there posted conspicuously on a bill-board. The mission of the bill-board is to call attention to the fact that there is such-and-such an entertainment and that it may be seen at such-and-such a house. There is no question in my mind but that this much is done for a production by "fake" stories concerning it. In rare instances, where the story accentuates the importance of the presentation and its success, or awakens interest in some member of the presenting company, the service performed may be even greater. At all events, the average manager expects this kind of

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advertising from the publicity promoter to whom he pays a salary, and, naturally, the publicity promoter feels that it is "his not to reason why." The press agent realizes that to any failure on his part will always be attributed the misfortunes of the management with which he is connected. Productions do a good business because they are good productions, and a bad business because they have bad press agents.

Every theatrical newspaper man knows the anecdote of the German cornetist *en tour* with a minstrel company. The organization was toiling up a steep hill that lay between the railway station and the town. The cornetist was warm and he was tired. "The camel's back" broke when at last he stubbed his toe against a stone. Picking up the obstruction, he threw it as far away as he could. "Ach!" he exclaimed. "Ve got a fine advance agent!"

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Being a discussion as to which pursuit is the more painful, with various entertaining and instructive remarks as to the method of following both.

AT my side lies an advertisement reading: "I will teach you to write plays for \$10!"

If the professor means that he can teach you to write plays that will bring you ten dollars, he may be speaking the truth. If he means that for ten dollars, or a hundred dollars, or a hundred thousand, he can teach you to write plays, he is a liar!

Aunt Emma, who represents the palmy days of the stage, and "used to be with Booth and Barrett", once gave me her opinion of schools of acting. "One can learn to fence", she said, "and to walk and articulate properly. But one cannot learn to think or to feel, and without thinking and feeling there is no acting." Pre-

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cisely the same thing may be said of playwriting.

Of course, there is a great deal that the dramatist must know about drama. W. T. Price's interesting volume on the subject contains about a hundred iron-clad principles that should be read, and re-read, and then forgotten. Such of the number as cling to your subconsciousness can't do you any harm, and probably will do you a lot of good. The others might help to make you a capable mechanic. Rostand's rooster, once he had been told *how* to crow, couldn't crow—fell to the ground, as it were, between two schools. Bronson Howard, asked to compile a book of rules for playwriting, declined on the ground that he feared being tempted to follow them.

To learn to do anything—do it! If you would know how to write plays write them, read them, go to see them. Then think a while, and write some more. If you feel sure you have a big idea—and sometimes it seems to me that the big ideas come most often to people who

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can't use them—pool it with the skill of someone who is willing to give craftsmanship for inventive genius—and watch him. Avery Hopwood collaborated on "Clothes" before he went single-handed at "Nobody's Widow", and, midway, he leased his experience to the novelist who furnished the plot of "Seven Days." Harriet Ford helped Joseph Medill Patterson write "The Fourth Estate", and now Mr. Patterson is exhibiting signs by which one may predict that he will do something alone. Wilson Mizner worked with George Bronson Howard on "The Only Law", and with Paul Armstrong on "The Deep Purple", and we may expect soon a piece that will bear only the name of Wilson Mizner.

"What a lucky fellow!" we say occasionally of some new author who springs into notice. "His first play, and a huge success!" But every professional reader in town could tell you that this success *wasn't* "his first play." While I was reading for the firm of Sam S. & Lee Shubert, I saw three or four manuscripts from the pens

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of Rachel Crothers and Thompson Buchanan. "The Three of Us" did not surprise me, nor "A Woman's Way." I knew, and every man in my profession knew, that Miss Crothers and Mr. Buchanan had spent years turning out pieces they could not sell. They worked, and they studied, and they went to the theater thoughtfully until they could write pieces that would sell.

Poets may be born or made, according to the field they occupy, but playwrights must be born *and* made. However, there isn't the least use of dwelling on this fact. To the end of time men and women who wouldn't think of trying to fashion a horseshoe without first having served an apprenticeship with some blacksmith will go on endeavoring to create comedies and tragedies without having made the least effort to shape their talents—even to whet their instincts.

Once upon a time, in a speech delivered somewhere, I said that, everything else being equal, the author who had never produced a

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play had the best chance of producing a good one. I was wrong. It is true that the new-comer is likely to have fresher ideas than the old stager, and that generally he dramatizes a lifetime of experience, instead of dramatizing only what he has gleaned between contracts. That accounts for the fact that some tyros never repeat their primal successes. But, even in this period of the novice, when appreciation of novelty submerges appreciation of skill, statistics prove that a majority of the pronounced hits are the work of established authors.

We believe the contrary, as we believe that most marriages turn out badly, because beginners at authorship and enders of matrimony attract attention. Much was said of the novices who won laurels last season, and yet every single piece that ran a hundred nights or so on Broadway was by an Avery Hopwood, a Winchell Smith, or a David Belasco. Any number of brilliant young men flashed into view, and probably will remain in view, but, as yet, of necessity, they are conspicuous for promise

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rather than for fulfillment. The greatest originality, the most synthetic ingenuity, and the sharpest wit were displayed by H. S. Sheldon, in "The Havoc"; by Philip H. Bartholomae, in "Over Night"; by Anne Caldwell, in "The Nest Egg"; by Tom Barry, in "The Upstart"; by Al Thomas, in "Her Husband's Wife", and by George Bronson Howard and Wilson Mizner in "The Only Law."

The danger faced by new men is that they may be snuffed out by their first failures. Such an ungenerous reception as was given "The Upstart", for example, might well discourage an author to the utter ruin of his career. Managers, too, are likely to judge by the box office rather than by the play—an exceedingly short sighted policy in a "business" whose future depends upon the proper nursing of its infants. The fluttering fledgling of today is the eagle of tomorrow. Porter Emerson Browne, Jules Eckert Goodman, Edward Sheldon, Thompson Buchanan, Avery Hopwood, James Forbes, the debutants of yester-year, are the leading drama-

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tists of this.

Naturally, everybody is trying to duplicate their experience. Everybody writes plays. Some time ago an ambitious individual walked into my office and announced that he had come from Rochester to submit a tragedy in blank verse. I suggested that he need not have gone to so much trouble and expense. "It wasn't any trouble or expense", he replied. "I had to come anyway. I'm a conductor on the New York Central."

Theodore Burt Sayre, who wrote "The Commanding Officer", and who is the reader for Charles Frohman, told me not long ago that his most persistent visitor was a policeman, who had composed a farce in six acts. He also showed me a letter the author of which declared "I seen menny plays that cost a doler and wasnt won-too-three with my play." Every manager in New York has received a Brooklyn shoemaker who feels certain he has produced a comic opera infinitely superior to the best efforts of Gilbert and Sullivan. Of the would-be

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dramatists in the learned professions, I should say that physicians are rarest as playwrights, that journalists provide the best material, and that clergymen produce the most and the worst.

With so many Cinderellas attempting to crowd their feet into the shoes of Pinero and Jones, there can be no limit to the number of manuscripts submitted each week to well known producers. The general idea, I believe, is that managers are quite buried beneath piles of plays. This is not absolutely true. Such an office as that of Henry B. Harris, in the Hudson Theater, or of The Liebler Company, in Fifth Avenue, may be the destination of from six to ten manuscripts a week. About a third of this number come from agents, and these are likely to receive quickest consideration, since the reader knows that, if they were utterly without promise, they would not have been sent him. The crop of flat and cylindrical packages fluctuates with altered conditions. The manager who makes money out of the work of an unknown author is sure to receive far more than his share

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of contributions during the next year or two. William A. Brady got a thousand plays a month from obscure aspirants immediately after the production of "Way Down East."

It is a fallacy widely current among new writers that their "copy" is returned unread. One of the first theatrical stories I ever heard concerned a woman who put sand between the pages of her rolled manuscript and found it there still when the piece came back to her. Nowadays, when the demand for material so far exceeds the supply as to have become almost frantic, it is true not only that every play is looked into, but that almost every play is looked into by every manager. Round and round the circle they go, being judged from a hundred viewpoints by a hundred men who know that a lucky strike means a fortune, and who are eager in proportion. It is my firm belief that all the good plays, not to speak of a fair number of bad ones, have been or are about to be produced. Any piece that is not utterly, hopelessly valueless is sure to find some

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appreciator in the end. There are instances of manuscripts that, like "My Friend From India", travel up and down Broadway for years, only to be accepted and staged at last.

I have said that the dramatist who "arrives" generally has announced himself first through various rolled and typewritten visiting cards. The parcel that comes from Findlay, Ohio, or Omaha, Nebraska, bearing the address of some one of whom the reader never heard before, is pretty certain to be without promise. Usually, the manuscript betrays itself in its first ten pages, and what follows rarely contains an idea that might have been valuable even if its owner had learned his trade. When the manager does discover a story worth while, or the suggestion of a story, usually he is quick to put its originator in touch with a literary manicure.

Charles Frohman, who frequently is styled "The Napoleon of the Drama", takes no such Napoleonic chances. If you will look over one of Mr. Frohman's budgets you will find that two-thirds of the plays he announces have been

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presented abroad, and that the other third are from the pens of such celebrities as Augustus Thomas. Naturally, this is the safe, sane, and more-or-less sure method, and yet, even when judged from a purely commercial view-point, it has its disadvantages. If the system does not entail such losses as other managers suffer, neither does it render possible such gains. Mr. Frohman paid George Ade royalties for "Just Out of College", which was a failure, far in excess of those granted by Henry W. Savage for "The County Chairman." Popular dramatists turn out pretty poor stuff at times, as Mr. Frohman was reminded when he produced William Gillette's "Electricity", and excellent material may come from an unexpected source, as Wagenhals & Kemper discovered when they purchased "Paid in Full" from a man whose only previous work had been the unlucky "Sergeant James." As to the invariable wisdom of offering here plays that were hits in Paris and London, I can say only that sometimes we in America differ with our cousins in France and Eng-

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land. We differed widely in the cases of "The Speckled Band", "The Scarlet Pimpernel", and "The Foolish Virgin." It would appear to be a much safer expedient to turn over doubtful pieces to stock companies in one provincial city or another and then to abide by the result. This expedient, by the way, has the advantage of being inexpensive.

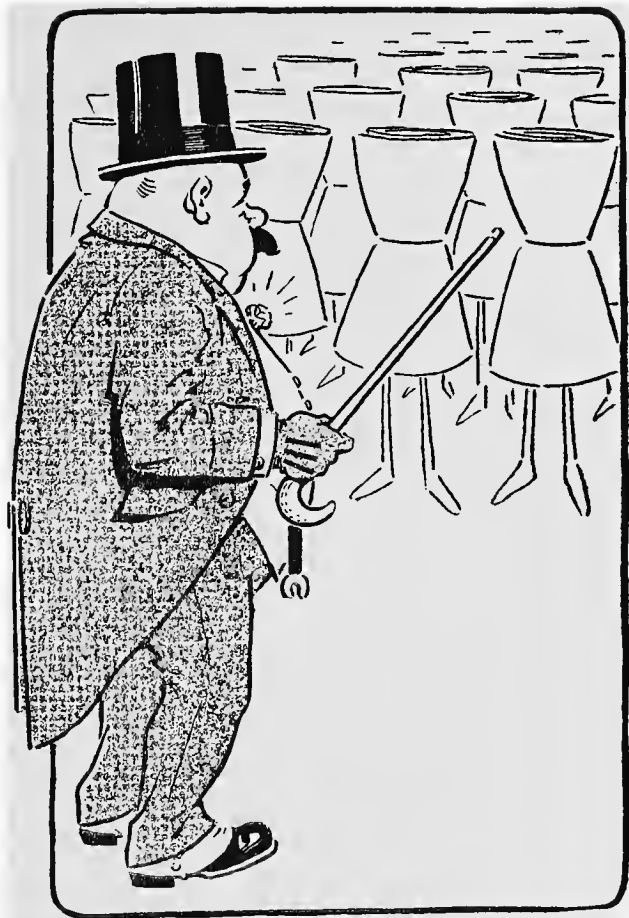
It is very difficult to identify a good play. When I was sixteen years old, and didn't know whether manuscripts were an inch thick or a mile, I felt quite sure that the manager who produced a bad play was a fool. I used to say this frankly in the newspaper on which I was employed, just as a lot of other cock-sure young men have been doing ever since. Latterly, however, I have observed that a great many experienced producers average about three failures to every one success, and I leave the superior attitude to the literatti whose cleverness is valued by their employers at from fifteen to fifty dollars a week. The late A. M. Palmer, after a long life-time of experience, said to me: "There

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does not live a man who can tell a good play from a bad one by reading it. If there *were* such a Solomon he would be worth half a million dollars per annum to any manager in New York. Personally, I have refused so many money-makers and accepted so many money-losers that I select material now-a-days by guess work. I tossed a coin once to decide whether or not I should buy what afterward proved to be one of the biggest hits of my career."

I have said that it is difficult to indentify a good play; it should not be difficult to pass upon a bad one. Some of the things that reach our stage are so very bad that nothing in the foregoing paragraph excuses or explains their production. Several years ago there was referred to me a romantic drama, written by a visiting Englishman. I advised against it, but my employers were determined in its favor, and the piece was presented soon afterward at the Princess Theater.

On the opening night, just after the second act, Louis De Foe, dramatic critic of The



*"It is very difficult to
identify a good play"*

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World, came to me, and said: "I got here late, and so lost the thread of the story. Can you tell me what the play is about?"

I tried and failed.

One of my employers stood nearby. "Let's ask him?" I suggested. We did—and *he* didn't know. "Haven't you seen it?" inquired Mr. De Foe.

"Yes", quoth the manager, "and I've read it, and—and it has something to do with love, but I—I forget the details." He suggested that we wait until after the performance and speak to the author.

That gentleman told us that the story concerned a soldier of fortune, who was about to do something or other—I don't remember what—when he received a letter that altered his intentions.

"So I observed", said Mr. De Foe. "But why should it have altered them? What was in the letter?"

The author looked at him blankly. "By Jove!" he explained. "I don't know. I never

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thought of *that!*''

The next day he drafted a letter that would explain matters and asked me to have it printed in the program. But, as the piece was to close the following night, it didn't seem worth while.

Of course, no play as bad as this should ever find its way to the footlights, and yet I am obliged to confess that a great many do. In fact, fifteen years of observation have forced me to the conclusion that the finer the texture of a play, the more unusual its theme, the smaller the author's chance of finding a manager for it. Also, one must admit, the smaller that manager's chance of finding a public. Though they are not so numerous as one would like to see them, we have producers of keen artistic sensibilities; some of them, like Charles Frohman, George Tyler, Henry B. Harris, David Belasco, Henry Miller and Wagenhals & Kemper, men who are not averse to losing money on a worthy enterprise or, at least, to taking a long chance of making it. For these men we should be grateful, and, though the New Theater has

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brought out nothing remarkable from an untried pen, we should be grateful, too, for an institution whose purpose is producing the best, whether the best is profitable or not.

So many mental qualities are essential to the correct appraisal of a play. For one thing, the manager must see not only what it is but what it may become. Often the hardest work in playwriting has to be done after the play has been produced. Pieces that seemed hopeless when they were acted initially have been turned into huge successes. Scenes are switched about, lines changed, often whole acts reconstructed. I know a woman who was compelled to cut her play in half after it was produced. Ordinarily one minute is required to act each page of type-written manuscript, but this work, which contained only one hundred and fifty pages, ran nearly five hours. Difficult as such condensation must have been, the task that confronted the author in question was not to be compared with that of lengthening a play. It is not advisable for embryonic dramatists to cut too close-

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ly according to pattern. To tone down a strong play or shorten a long one is easy; to build up a weak play or successfully pad out a short one is impossible.

Most of the manuscripts that come to the desk of the reader do not prompt sufficient doubt for any manager to be willing to try them. A great many would seem to be the product of lunatics. Not long ago I had a dramatization of a Russian novel that contained eleven acts and twenty-one scenes. The adapter simply had melted down the whole six hundred pages of fiction and was trying to pour it onto the stage. Another offering, called "The Dogs of Infidelity", proved to be an argument against atheism in five acts and seven scenes. The scoundrel of this masterpiece was Robert G. Ingersol, and the play was accompanied by a cartoon showing the agnostic fleeing from two police officers, marked "Logic" and "Sarcasm", who were pursuing him at the bidding of Justice, in the person of the author. Beneath this picture were typewritten the favorable opinions of a number



*"A woman who was compelled
to cut her play in half"*

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of people who claimed to have read the piece. Standing in the center of the stage, the villain of a melodrama still in my possession is supposed to commit suicide by exploding a dynamite cartridge in his mouth. Beneath the directions for this bit of business, the author has written: "The performance concludes here." I should think it might!

Of course, it is not often that one gets plays as absurd as these. If it were, the reading of manuscript would not be so dull and profitless a task. The ordinary play is notable only for its crudity, its artificiality, its lack of color, and its hopeless failure to rise above the conventional and the commonplace. Dramatists follow each other like sheep, and the smaller the dramatist happens to be the more closely he follows. Thus it is that whenever somebody produces a piece with a situation that creates comment, every second manuscript one reads from that time on contains exactly the same situation. A long while ago I grew so much interested in the likeness between plot and plot that I catalogued two

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hundred plays according to their general character. The result was as follows:

Dramas in which woman goes to man's rooms at midnight.....	37
“ in which woman betrays man and then saves him.....	19
“ in which wronged woman gives evi- dence at end of play.....	6
“ in which man unwittingly falls in love with woman meant for him	9
“ in which woman unwittingly falls in love with man meant for her	3
“ in which wealth is unexpectedly derived from a mine or a patent	22
“ built on the question of “love or duty”	24
“ built on the question of the fitness of a reformed man or woman to marry	16
“ in which man or woman reforms the person he or she loves.....	3
Comedies in which husband or wife ends	

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the philandering of wife or husband	
by seeming to condone it	20
Farces based on mistaken identity	31
“ built around the necessity of a man	
lying to his wife	28

The total of the table is not two hundred, because several of these plays had none of the features mentioned, while others had more than one.

Of course, it is well-nigh impossible for any dramatist, no matter how well-meaning, to devise unparalleled characters, situations and stories. Just as the fact that there are only so many notes in the scale has been urged as an excuse for composers whose music is reminiscent, so I would insist that there are only so many strings in the heart. There is a limit to the number of situations that can be brought about in real life, and, of course, there is a much more definite limit to the number of these situations which have dramatic value. In certain elemental facts all plays must be alike. For example, it

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is inevitable that a large number of plays shall have what is known as the "dramatic triangle"—which means the conflict of two men and a woman or of two women and a man. It is inevitable that a great majority of plays shall deal with that one great elemental emotion—love. Once, when I was very young indeed, I experimented in writing a comedy in which nobody was in love. The piece was presented in Washington, and, to the best of my recollection, it lasted two consecutive nights. This convinced me that there might be a line beyond which one could not go in the effort to be unique.

There are a great number of things, however, that are so hackneyed and conventional that it is no longer possible for an author to attempt them. I do not think any manager would buy another play in which the crucial situation was the concealment of the heroine in the apartments of the hero or the villain. From time immemorial this has been the stock episode for the third act climax in a four act play, and audiences have begun to expect it as they expect supper af-

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ter the fourth act. Personally, I am free to confess that I should not be likely to recommend the purchase of any drama in which the conclusion of the third act did not bring a surprise calculated to make an audience sit up and take notice. No author of today would dare begin his work with a conversation between a maid and a butler. Neither would he care to conceal one of his characters behind a screen or to conclude his play with the finding of a bundle of papers. The cigarette is still the hero of the society drama, and it is still true on the stage that the happy conclusion of the love affair between the juvenile and the ingenue usually is coincident with the conclusion of the love affair between the leading man and the leading woman. We begin to have heroes who are not too angelically good, however, and villains who have motives more human than the mere desire to be beastly and draw a hundred and fifty dollars a week for it. Very slowly and gradually the perfect woman, the high-hatted knave, the wronged girl, the comic Irishman, the naval lieutenant of

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comic opera, the English butler and their associates are passing from our midst. Peace to their ashes!

Plays have their epochs, just as books do, and there are fashions in the drama as pronounced as those in dress. Always one successful work of a particular class brings about a host of imitations, and, for a time, it seems as though the public would never tire of that particular kind of entertainment. "The Prisoner of Zenda" was responsible for a hundred romances laid in mythical kingdoms; "Lady Windimere's Fan" brought drawing room comedy into vogue; "'Way Down East" bred a perfect epidemic of pastorals; "Sherlock Holmes" created a demand for plays concerning criminals. All of these varieties of entertainment, save possibly the last, have been laid on the shelf, and we now are going in vigorously for frothy farce and comic opera in long skirts. The manner in which one author follows the lead of another, as demonstrated above, extends beyond the selection of such important things as stories, and

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reaches even to titles. Ten years ago we couldn't have a name without the word "of" in it. On the bill-boards were advertised "The White-washing of Julia", "The Manoeuvres of Jane", "The Superstitions of Sue", "The Stubbornness of Geraldine" and a score of others. Then somebody christened a charming sketch "Hop-o'-My-Thumb", and for a while it seemed that we could get nothing but hyphenated titles, such as "Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire" and "All-of-a-Sudden-Peggy." Now-a-days the vogue seems to be the combination of an article and a noun—"The Boss", "The Nigger", "The Gamblers" and "The Concert."

Please do not understand that, in calling attention to these similarities, I intend to accuse anyone of plagiarism. Deliberate theft of ideas from contemporary offerings is likely to result in law-suits, and I don't believe that there are left in the printed dramas any ideas worth stealing. I used to hear an interesting story of Paul Potter's writing original plays in the Boston Public Library, but it seemed to me that much of

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his work was too good to have been filched from the old fellows whose publishers bound their vulgarity, their leaden dialogue and their uningenious situations in yellow covers. It is very difficult, as I have said, to squeeze new situations out of a dull world, from the manners and morals of which about four hundred dramas have been pressed every year during the past half century. It is especially hard to devise original material in America, where prudish restrictions hedge us about and anything deep and vital in life immediately is set down as immoral. American authors cannot wring novel incidents from the emotions; they must profit by such circumstances as the invention of wireless telegraphy and the automobile. The telephone and the motor car are speedily becoming bulwarks of the drama in the United States!

The possibility of giving subtle and original treatment to familiar phases of life, together with the attendant possibility of revealing human nature in the theater, hold forth the chief promise along this line. Clever twisting and turn-

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ing will make a new incident from an old one, as is best demonstrated in what Beaumont and Fletcher did with Lope de Vega when they adapted "Sancho Ortez" into "The Custom of the Country", and playwrights are learning to turn little things to vital account in the construction of their plays. A glance at a photograph now-a-days is made to convey all what was indicated in a five-minutes talk between butler and maid twenty years ago.

As to the matter of heart interest, that, after all, is the thing that counts most, and that is eternal and inexhaustible. Charles Klein, author of "The Music Master", put this to me neatly not long ago in an attempt to prove the advantage of the realistic drama over the romantic. "Supposing a man comes to you", he remarked, "and says that his wife has just fallen out of a balloon. You're not sorry, because you can't understand why his wife should have gone up in a balloon. Let the same man say to you, however, that he is out of a position and that his family is starving, and see how quickly the tears

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will come into your eyes. So far as modern audiences are concerned, the old duel-fighting, hose-wearing romantic heroes are up in a balloon. We want sorrows and joys we can comprehend."

It is this creed that makes the new dramatist an entity worth seeking. If it proves difficult to discover him among the thousands who write plays, it at least is worth while to cultivate him when he is found among those who write promising plays. "By their works ye shall know them" is particularly applicable to the men who will some day succeed Barrie and Pinero. They will bear watching. If I were a producing manager I should keep in touch with the men whose first pieces indicate the possession of ability. I would set them at work, not at tailoring plays to fit personalities, but at realizing their ideas and their ideals. Certainly this great country is full of material waiting for dramatization, and it must be equally true that it is full of authors capable of accomplishing the task. They will not be the illiterate glory-

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hunters who deluge theatrical offices with their manuscripts, nor will they be the celebrities whose brains have been pressed dry. It were wise to look for them among the people whose professions draw them into close touch with the real world and the theater; among the newspaper men and the enthusiastic play-lovers; among those whose first and second efforts are now the financial failures on Broadway.

THE PERSONALITIES OF OUR PLAY- WRIGHTS

Being an effort to out do Ernest Thompson Seton and Charles G. D. Roberts at their own game—which is speaking literally.

NOT long ago an intelligent young man walked into a meeting of the Society of American Dramatists and Composers, at the Hotel Astor, and, after scanning the faces about him, inquired: "Is this the Cloak and Suit Manufacturers' Association?"

Don't blame the young man. If tomorrow you undertook on a wager to tell a prosperous tailor from a celebrated author, your safest plan would be to select the individual who looked more like a tailor, and say: "That is the author!" Among persons whose acquaintances do not figure in the public prints, except as "Old Subscriber" or "Vox Populi", the playwright is still supposed to be distinguishable by

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long, curly hair, a flowing tie, a high hat, and a frock coat, worn with the right hand inserted in the space between the first and second buttons.

As a matter of fact, this description fits only the quack doctor and the vender of patent medicines. There *are* flowing-tie playwrights, but generally they belong in the ranks of the ineffectual and the unproduced. One sees them oftener at studio teas than at "first nights." In whatever other respects they may differ, our dramatists are pretty much alike as regards the commonplaceness of their manner and appearance. Most of them regard the writing of plays as a business, and go about it as a baker goes about making his loaves or a plumber about mending a pipe.

On the whole, it is easy to understand the disappointment of a hero-worshipper to whom a companion pointed out Charles Klein. The author of a dozen successful pieces tells the story with great gusto. "It was on a ferry boat," he relates, "and two young chaps were

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standing near the forward doors. As I strolled past, one of them remarked: 'That's the fellow that wrote "The Gamblers."' "

"My chest had already begun to expand when I caught the rejoinder. 'Him!' exclaimed the other. 'Well, I'll be damned!'" "

Augustus Thomas and David Belasco are two dramatists who would rob no layman of his illusions. Mr. Belasco, whose clerical collar and spiritual face have been pictured in numberless newspapers and magazines, looks every inch a poet, and his soft voice and far-away manner help sustain the impression. Mr. Thomas more evidently belongs to our own mundane sphere; he is a man of the world, distinguished by his poise and polish, by the suavity, reserve and equilibrium that come with confidence and after long experience. The late Clyde Fitch had these qualities, too. He was an artist to his finger tips, a thinker of fine thoughts and a dreamer of great dreams. This article originally began with an account of him, and, since Clyde Fitch was much more than a

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transient figure in our theater, I see no reason why he should be left out of it now.

“Mr. Fitch”, I wrote the day he sailed for France, never to return, “is the son of a former army officer, forty-four years old, graduated from Amherst College, and has spent much of his life traveling about Europe. He is quite tall, rather thickly built, and has a heavy, dark mustache. My acquaintance with him dates from the performance of my first original comedy, ‘The Little Gray Lady’, and is due to a friendly feeling for the new-comers in his profession that is one of his finest traits.

“ ‘The Little Gray Lady’ was being presented in the Garrick Theater, and I was somewhat excited, the morning after its premiere, at learning that a box had been secured for Mr. Fitch. That night I stationed myself across the auditorium, so that I might judge how he enjoyed the entertainment. My heart almost stopped beating when, soon after the curtain lifted, the object of my interest arose from his seat, and manifested every intention of depart-

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ing. 'Good heaven!' I exclaimed to myself. 'Is the piece as contemptible as that? And, even if it is, what an affront; what a rude thing to do!' My mortification was short-lived. Mr. Fitch and his party did walk out of their box, but only to take orchestra chairs, from which they had a better view of the stage. The next morning I received a generous letter. '“The Little Gray Lady” is a big “Little Lady”, I think.' And would I lunch tomorrow at Mr. Fitch's town house, in East Fortieth Street?

“This house has afforded a wide-open outlet for its owner's constitutional lavishness, and is, perhaps, as luxuriously appointed and as exquisitely fitted as any residence of its size in New York. Mr. Fitch loves beautiful things, and invests in them with a prodigality that would frighten the heirs of a copper king. 'It doesn't matter how much money I make,' he said to me one afternoon. 'I spend a big income as quickly as a little one.' The Fortieth Street domicile is literally crowded with paintings, carvings, ceramics, and other objects of

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art. A gentleman who dined there recently had his attention attracted by three curiously wrought cigarette cases that stood on the table, one at each plate. He supposed them to be beaten brass, set with rhine stones, and was amazed when his wife discovered that they were of solid gold and diamonds. 'Their intrinsic worth,' he said, 'could not have been less than ten thousand dollars. Imagine my horror when I remembered that I had been on the point of inquiring whether they were meant to be dinner favors!'

"Mr. Fitch maintains two establishments beside the place in New York; one at Greenwich, called Quiet Corners—a young woman I know insists upon speaking of it as 'Cozy Corners'—and the other an estate of two hundred acres at Katohna, in Westchester County. James Forbes, who wrote 'The Chorus Lady' and 'The Travelling Saleman', relates an experience of a visit to the former residence. Here he found a stable, which, in lieu of horses, held hundreds of masterpieces in marble and bronze which the

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collector had not been able to resist purchasing, but for which he had no room in his house!

"Managers who make contracts with Clyde Fitch will tell you that he appreciates the value of money, but that commodity certainly doesn't cling long to his fingers. However, a responsible man can afford to be irresponsible, and an industrious man to be extravagant. Mr. Fitch has written fifty-four plays in less than twenty years, an average of one play every four months! When you stop to consider that an ordinary manuscript consists of about one hundred and thirty typed pages, and that each piece must be thought out, drafted and re-drafted, rehearsed and produced you will admit that the labor involved in making such a record must have been Herculean.

"Nevertheless, Mr. Fitch never seems to be hurried or worried. He entertains a good deal, goes to the theater frequently, and takes a boyish interest in trifles. It is this interest that fills his work with human touches, the small topicalities of the moment. I saw him one



*"Clyde Fitch's ability to
work under any circumstances"*

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night at 'The Three Twins', and he commented laughingly upon the catchiness of the song, 'Cuddle Just a Little Closer.' Two months later I found that air as the motif, almost the Wagnerian theme, of his comedy, 'The Bachelor.'

"The secret of the Fitch productiveness undoubtedly lies in his ability to work under any circumstances, in odd moments. Austin Strong, author of 'The Toymaker of Nuremberg', and one or two other guests were spending a rainy week-end in the living room at Katohna, when their host excused himself, and, sitting at a desk the other side of the room, began writing. 'Go on talking', he said; 'you don't bother me.' He had plunged into the second act scene between Mabel Barrison and Charles Dickson in 'The Blue Mouse', and he finished it that afternoon. Mr. Forbes saw him one morning in Venice, gliding about in a gondola and scribbling as fast as his pencil could cover the pages. That exquisite bit of 'The Girl Who Has Everything', in which Eleanor Robson punished little Don-

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ald Gallagher by compelling him to strike her, was indited upon a pocket pad while the chauffeur was repairing the playwright's car, which had broken down between Greenwich and New York.

"Mr. Fitch abrogates to himself the task of producing his works, taking personal charge of everything, from the selection of the company to the designing of color schemes and the purchase of five and ten cent articles of bric-a-brac. Most people have heard of his skill at rehearsal. He and Mr. Thomas are two of the best stage managers in America. Seated quietly in a corner of the auditorium, or standing just back of the footlights, Mr. Fitch gives the directions that make his performances perfect mosaics of marvelously life-like minutae. Of stories bearing upon his quick perception, his instinct for detail, and his understanding of cause and effect there are enough to make a saga, but one anecdote will serve the purpose of this article.

"It was at the dress rehearsal of 'Girls', to-

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ward the end of the first act, when the young women were climbing into their roosts and saying 'good night.' A property man appeared with a radiator, which the author had insisted upon having in the setting, 'because I never saw a flat without one.' The stage hand set down his burden and was about to tip toe into the wings, when he was stopped by a sharp command. 'Wait!' exclaimed Mr. Fitch.

"The property man waited. 'Excuse me', he muttered. 'I didn't mean to interrupt—'

" 'Never mind that!' the dramatist continued. 'Look here! Miss Maycliffe says "Goodnight!" You wait two seconds and then hammer like blazes on a piece of iron behind that radiator. I want the noise that steam makes in the pipes—'

" 'I'm on!' grinned the property man. So were the others. Everybody in that house had been awakened in the dead of night by the malicious clanking of the steam pipes, and everybody recognized the bit of every-day. The audience the next night was not less quick of perception, and

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the diversion proved, as you probably know, to be one of the most effective bits of comedy in 'Girls.' "

All this was written two years ago. Quiet Corners and The Other House are deserted now, and the beautiful things that filled them, and the residence in Fortieth Street, have been distributed. A part of the collection was willed to the Metropolitan Museum. It is pathetic to reflect that the first Fitch play to win unqualified praise from the critics was produced after the death of its author. Yet "The City" was not a better piece than "The Climbers", or "Her Own Way", or "The Girl With the Green Eyes", or "The Truth." Clyde Fitch was dead; therein lay the difference. The living Clyde Fitch always was treated by the journalistic reviewers as a sort of malefactor, as a man whose deliberate intent was to do bad work. Only his intimates know how keenly he felt this. "Newspaper praise," he said to me once, "is for the dramatist on his way up or his way down; never for the dramatist at the top."

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Clyde Fitch was the most brilliant man who ever wrote for the stage in America. Heaven rest his soul!

Augustus Thomas conducts rehearsals from an orchestra stall in the body of the theater, whence he shouts instructions through a megaphone. I have often printed the story of the retort courteous which he is said to have made to J. J. Shubert when that impresario interrupted a rehearsal of "The Witching Hour", but, in this connection, perhaps the tale will bear repetition.

According to my informant, the author of "Arizona" was intent upon a serious scene when Mr. Shubert, who was financially interested in the production, stopped the players, and, turning to Mr. Thomas, remarked: "I think this would be a good place for some witty dialogue."

"Yes?" replied Mr. Thomas. "As for instance?"

He is a bold and a foolish man who throws himself upon the point of the playwright's ver-

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bal poignard, for, among those who know him, Mr. Thomas is as famous for his skill with speech as for his skill with the pen. He smiles as he thrusts, but the results are none the less sanguinary. "I thought Thomas was a man", Paul Armstrong is reported to have said of him, "until I saw him take a handkerchief from his sleeve. Men have hip pockets for their handkerchiefs."

"I had," quoth Mr. Thomas, when he heard the remark, "until I began to have my clothes made by a *good* tailor!"

This ready wit makes the dramatist one of the best, if not the best post prandial speaker in New York. Never a banquet at which he talks but the street rings the next day with quips of his making. "The trouble with amateur carvers", he said at the Friars' dinner to John Drew, "is that the gravy so rarely matches the wall paper." On another occasion he characterized a fatuous argument as being "like a chorus girl's tights, which touch every point and cover nothing."



"Augustus Thomas shouts instructions through a megaphone"

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Mr. Thomas finds time for many activities outside of his profession. Everyone knows of his energetic work for the cause of William Jennings Bryan. Throughout the three Bryan campaigns the dramatist made speeches, organized political meetings, and otherwise labored beneath the standard of the Commoner. Mr. Thomas' long suit is organizing. Upon the death of Bronson Howard, he succeeded to the presidency of the American Dramatists' Club, which he has metamorphosed into the Society of American Dramatists and Composers. The parent body was deep in the slough of despond, seeming to have no other purpose than proving that genius really is an infinite capacity for taking food. Mr. Thomas awakened the fraternal spirit, got committees to work on suggestions for plan and scope, benevolently assimilated a club of women playwrights, and created an association that is likely to be a power, instead of being merely a powwow, in the land.

The greater part of the year, Mr. Thomas

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lives at New Rochelle, but during the summer he goes frequently to his cottage, The Dingle, at East Hampton. He is a man fifty years old, and of particularly striking appearance. Tall, finely proportioned, smooth-shaven, with resolute face and hair just beginning to turn white, he would be observed in any gathering. As I have said, his manner is marked by complete self-possession, and a good deal of self-satisfaction. To this he certainly is entitled. A close friend of his believes that Mr. Thomas dramatized himself when he created the part of the quiet, masterful gambler, Jack Brookfield, in "The Witching Hour."

Charles Klein is of very small stature—a fact that probably accounts for the anecdote related earlier in my article. None of his family has been a sky-scraper. Manuel Klein, the composer, is not above five feet six, and Alfred Klein, another brother, who originated the role of the elephant tamer in "Wang", owed much of his success as a comedian to his brevity—that being, as you know, the soul of wit.

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Charles is the embodiment of dignity, and takes himself and his work most seriously. I think I have never seen a photograph of him that did not show him in his library, either writing or reading some ponderous tome. He has a fine head, with a lofty brow that grows to be a little loftier every year.

No estimate of Mr. Klein could be called complete which did not take account of his grit and stick-to-it-iveness. Connected with the theater from his earliest youth—he was call boy in the company with a relative of mine—he produced his first play when he was hardly more than twenty. His misses were many, and his hits few and far between, but he kept on trying, until, with David Warfield's first starring venture, "The Auctioneer", he struck the bullseye of public approval squarely in the middle. Today he probably is the wealthiest of our dramatists, and a couple of years ago it was estimated that his income could not be less than \$3,000 a week. He owns a charming home, called Shirley Manor after the principal

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female character in "The Lion and the Mouse", at Rowayton, Conn. In the same town he operates a hat factory of which his son until recently was the manager.

In the adamant quality of his "hard luck story", no one far surpasses Eugene Walter, whose income used to hover about that quoted as Mr. Klein's. It is told that this young man was lodging upon a park bench when Wagenhals & Kemper produced his "Paid in Full", but, personally, I am inclined to regard this tale as more picturesque than accurate. In need of money he may have been, but the parental Walters, who live in Cleveland, were quite able to prevent his lacking real necessities, and 'Gene himself has always been in the way of earning a living in the newspaper or the theatrical business. He served an apprenticeship as press agent of various attractions, and it was while both of us were acting in this capacity that we met at the Walnut Street Theater, in Philadelphia.

Mr. Walter's initial effort, "Sergeant James",



*"Eugene Walter was lodging
upon a park bench when
Wagenhals & Kemper
produced his 'Paid in Full' "*

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had just been produced, and had scored an unquestionable failure. He told me the story of the piece, and "it listened good", but I could not believe it possible that the man opposite me was capable of winning place in a profession of letters. Eugene Walter is not impressive to the naked eye. I had him in mind chiefly when I spoke of the ease with which one might mistake a dramatist for a prosperous tailor. Mr. Walter looks more like a neat and gentlemanly mechanic. He cannot be above thirty years of age, and his height and weight—he is five feet five and tips the scales in the neighborhood of a hundred and forty—make him seem to be about twenty-four. My recollection of his dress is that he usually wears a flannel shirt. I may be wrong as to this detail, but, in any event, his style and general appearance are such as to create the impression.

His demeanor suggests neither culture nor education, though, as I have said, he comes of a good family and had excellent schooling. The value of erudition, even so far as it concerns the

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technique of the drama, in the writing of plays he denies absolutely. In fact, I believe that his horror of being thought what he calls "a high brow" leads Mr. Walter to assume a contempt of art and letters, though he has it not. He has an intuitive appreciation of the beautiful, and yet, at a recent exhibition of the paintings of a great Spaniard, his only comment was, "Don't let's waste any more time in here!" "Playwrights are *born*", he has gone on record as observing. "You can't *learn* anything about playwriting."

If genius is the quality of doing by instinct, without great thought or labor, obeying the commands of a *something* outside of one's self, Eugene Walter is certainly a genius. If it is, as some philosopher has said, "an infinite capacity for taking pains", he is nothing of the sort. He works by fits and starts, idling unconscionably for months at a time, and then completing a play in a fortnight. "The Easiest Way" was written in ten days. Mr. Walter's method of composition really is nothing more nor less than

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improvisation—the method childern employ when they “make things up” as they “go along.”

The tools necessary to the process are one large room, one outfit of furniture, and one exceptionally rapid stenographer. Mr. Walter and the stenographer enter the room. The door is locked, and work is begun by placing the furniture as it is to be placed on the stage—in other words, by setting the scene. Then the young dramatist begins to act. He is all the characters in his play. He rushes about the apartment, quarreling with himself, making love to himself, now standing here as one person and then racing to the opposite end of the apartment to be another. All the time he is speaking the words that come into his mind as natural under the circumstances, and the stenographer is taking them down at top speed. At the end of an hour or two an act is finished, an invisible curtain is rung down, and, if the amanuensis hasn't fainted, as two did in one day of labor on “Paid in Full”, the stage is set for the

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next act.

Of course, you understand that, before the play reaches this point, the story, the situations, and even some details of dialogue must have been carefully thought out. In connection with Mr. Walter, I *should* say that they must have had time to assemble in his mind, having popped in, like Topsy, already grown. He goes about with what he himself described to me as "a seething mass of stuff in my head" until the "seething mass" cries for release, and then—the impromptu performance before the audience of one. The quickness of Mr. Walter's conception, the instantaneousness with which drama is formed for him, is illustrated by an experience of last winter.

We had been to witness a bad play—one doomed to close the following Saturday. "Hopeless!" I said, as we left the theater.

"Hopeless", repeated Mr. Walter, "but not without possibilities. If that idea had been mine, I should have commenced with the big situation of the third act. Then I should

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have worked backward, using the story of the—”

In five minutes he had sketched a new play, constructed around the theme of the old one, and it was a corker!

As everyone knows, Eugene Walter was married recently to Charlotte Walker, the actress, and it is common knowledge, too, that both were bitterly disappointed at David Belasco's refusal to assign the principal role in "The Easiest Way" to Miss Walker. For this disappointment her husband tried to atone by fitting her with "Just a Wife", but the piece failed sadly at the Belasco Theater. The Walters live in the Ansonia Apartments, in upper Broadway, but they are contemplating the erection of a home near Long Island Sound. The man who writes plays, or, for that matter, any other man who performs labor requiring close concentration, finds it impossible to do his best in New York. "The very air is laden with distraction", says George Broadhurst, author of "The Man of the Hour." "When I want to

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work I get as far as possible from Forty-second street."

A dramatist of a pattern with Eugene Walter's, though drawn in bolder, blacker lines, is Paul Armstrong, to whom theater-goers owe "Salomy Jane", "The Heir to the Hoorah" and "Alias Jimmy Valentine". Mr. Armstrong's contempt for the ordinary amenities, the graces of every-day, is own big brother to Mr. Walter's. He is a big, fine-looking fellow, characterized by tremendous vigor and virility, by what he himself would call "the punch." He is aggressively self-confident, where Augustus Thomas is only passively so; combative by disposition and much inclined to talk in superlatives. His broad-brimmed hat and his black imperial suggest the Westerner, though most of his life has been spent in New York. He was formerly a well-known authority on pugilism, writing for the *Evening Journal* under the nom de plume of "Right Cross."

Mr. Armstrong's hatred of theatrical man-

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agers used to be a by-word, but it has been less so since he himself undertook the production of his own melo-drama, "Society and the Bulldog." His experience with one impressario, A. H. Woods, to whom he sold "The Superstitions of Sue", is as amusing a story as I know.

"The Superstitions of Sue" already had been accepted by the two senior members of the firm of Sullivan, Harris & Woods, and Mr. Armstrong had an appointment to read the piece to the junior member at eleven o'clock one bright Sunday. Promptly at that hour, he appeared at the Woods residence, in Riverside Drive, accompanied by two friends. Introductions followed, and the friends sat down, with Mr. and Mrs. Woods, to hear the new farce.

Mr. Armstrong had hardly begun when the visitors burst into a roar of laughter. They howled afresh at every line, including descriptions of characters and "business", and the rendering was concluded with the pair rolling

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about in a perfect ecstasy of mirth. Mr. Woods regarded them with sober suspicion. His risibles hadn't been touched, but, when Mrs. Woods joined in the merriment, he determined that he didn't know humor when he met it, and, the seance being over, closed a contract to present "The Superstitions of Sue."

When the men had gone, Mr. Woods said to Mrs. Woods: "I suppose I'm dull, but I thought that play duller still. Of course, Armstrong's friends were *brought* to laugh, but when you began laughing, too, I knew the piece *must* be funny."

"Why", responded Mrs. Woods, "I only laughed because the others did. I wanted to be civil."

"The Superstitions of Sue" was one of the worst failures of its year.

I have spoken of Eugene Walter's method of work, but that method is not more remarkable than the faith in a special environment held by James Forbes. Even while he smiles at his own credulity, Mr. Forbes believes firm-

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ly that he can put forth his best effort only in Room 371 of the Bellevue Hotel, in Boston. Whenever he "feels a play coming on", he boards a train, journeys to The Hub, and locks himself up in the apartment which bears that number. There he composed the scenarios of "The Chorus Lady", "The Travelling Salesman," and "The Commuters."

"I can think more clearly on a railway train than anywhere else", declares Mr. Forbes. "A chair car is the ideal place for concentration." This young fellow differs from his colleagues in his inability to work in the country. He owns and occupies a veritable palace at Croton-on-Hudson, but he never attempts anything important there. He says: "I find my surroundings too alluring. Only conscience keeps me at a desk anyway, and conscience is weaker than the charm of outdoors." One rather fancies that Jimmie's conscience—he is "Jimmie" to his friends—is pretty rigid. He comes of Scotch ancestry, and was reared in a Scotch Presbyterian community in Canada. "The

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theater was held up to my youthful attention as a dreadful place", he told me one night, when we were lingering over supper. "The stock story in my family concerned a playhouse in Edinboro, which, being used sacreligously for the representation of a scene in heaven, was promptly burned, with every soul in it, as a divine judgment.

"This tale stuck fast in my memory. At the age of nine I stole away to see 'Uncle Tom's Cabin', and, when the transformation showed Little Eva in Paradise, I slipped out and waited in the street for the theater to burn down. I was terribly disappointed that nothing of the sort happened, and, after hanging around for the better part of the afternoon, I went home a confirmed agnostic."

Jimmie drifted from Scotch Presbyterianism into dramatic authorship by easy and natural stages. First he was employed in a wholesale grocery store, then he became an actor, a newspaper man, a press agent, a manager, and, finally, a playwright. A short story, which he had

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published under the title of "The Extra Girl", suggested "The Chorus Lady", and an acquaintance with Rose Stahl, who had been leading woman of a company in which he had acted, lead to her being chosen for the principal role in the one act play of that name. Mr. Forbes soon saw the possibility of amplifying the sketch into a four act comedy, and, though Miss Stahl was not enthusiastic about the idea at first, he induced her to assume the part in which she has since appeared more than a thousand times.

Mr. Forbes is a boyish-looking young man, small in stature, nervous in manner, with a swarthy skin, and an ocean of forehead into which descends a peninsula of glossy black hair. He is general manager for Henry B. Harris, and has numberless business duties to perform in his comfortable little office in the Hudson Theater. He writes exclusively for Mr. Harris, and has an interest in the profits of his plays, besides the regular royalties, so that he has made a considerable fortune out of three big successes. Mr. Forbes probably is the only

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dramatist in the world who, in addition to writing his play, stages it, attends to the details of business management, plans the advertising campaign, and supervises the press work.

Winchell Smith, who made the comedy, "Brewster's Millions", and who is author of "The Fortune Hunter", says he chose dramatic authorship "because you don't have to be grammatical in plays." "I couldn't write a magazine article for a million dollars", he adds, "but dialogue comes easy to me." However, Mr. Smith, like many others of his cult, hates "the drudgery of composition." He likes to plan a new piece, but wishes that the manuscript "could be got out of my head by a surgical operation." Mr. Smith is a tall, slender, diffident young man, with a keen sense of humor and a varied experience. He began life in the grain and feed business in Hartford, and acted for many years in support of that still more celebrated Hartfordian, William Gillette. Langdon Mitchell, author of "The New York Idea", and John Luther Long, author of "Madame

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Butterfly", both are Philadelphians. Mr. Mitchell won fame as a poet, under the pseudonym of John Philip Varley, before "Becky Sharp" brought him to the attention of theater-goers. Mr. Long, whose ethereal fancies are so charming, pretends to practice the prosaic profession of law at 629 Walnut street.

Eugene Presbrey, grey-bearded, vibrant, intense, devotes himself mainly to the adaptation of novels. "I want the novel that can't be dramatized!" he declares, and, for this reason, he found much pleasure in doing "Raffles." It seemed a hopeless task to win sympathy for a confirmed criminal, and Mr. Presbrey had about abandoned the task, when, one evening in Seventh Avenue, he saw a man running at top speed, a crowd in pursuit, and heard the cry: "Stop thief!" "The fellow was just behind me", says the author, "and, turning around, I got a good view of his hunted, desperate expression. Before I knew what I was doing, I whispered: 'Get up the alley!' *And I didn't tell the policeman.* 'No sympathy for

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a criminal!' I exclaimed to myself, when I had leisure to analyze my action. 'Why, every human being is a criminal at heart! He knows that, under certain circumstances, he might be the fugitive, and he feels sorry for the other fellow in proportion.' " Mr. Presbrey wrote "Raffles" in three weeks, and it has been acted in every country that boasts a theater.

I have at my side a list of some thirty men and women who write plays and of whom I could chat indefinitely. Each of these authors is so interesting, all of them have lived so many stories, that it is hard for me to admit a space limit and forebear being their Boswell. There is George Broadhurst, lean and business-like, who made a reputation by his farces, and then, when that had been forgotten, made another by his serious dramas. There is Paul Potter, white-haired, rotund, genial, the intimate friend of Charles Frohman, and the adaptor of "Trilby." There are earnest young William C. De Mille, author of "Strongheart"; Paul Kester, a wisp of a lad, timid and self-conscious, who

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glories in swashbuckling melodramas and who did "When Knighthood Was in Flower"; Thompson Buchanan, newspaper reporter to his finger tips, who landed a big success in "A Woman's Way" and afterward wrote "The Cub"; Sydney Rosenfeld, the wit and dreamer, one time editor of Puck, who refused to turn out a book sub rosa with Augustus Thomas because he objected to any scheme "which involved pooling our separate fames to become anonymous"; and there are a whole army of brilliant young chaps, like William J. Hurlbut, of "The Fighting Hope", who lives a stone's throw from me at Shoreham, L. I., and Avery Hopwood, who collaborated with me in producing "Clothes", and with Mary Roberts Rhinehart in producing "Seven Days."

I should like to tell you about pretty Margaret Mayo, who has built a villa from the proceeds of "Polly of the Circus", and whose first fame as a playwright was achieved under circumstances described elsewhere in this book. Rachel Crothers is a sedate, New Englishish

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young woman, who used to teach acting in the Wheatcroft School, and whom I met when she was going from office to office with the manuscript of "The Three of Us." Rida Johnson, famed for "Brown of Harvard" and "The Lottery Man", is tall, dark, fine-looking, and her professional career began when she was leading woman for her husband, James Young, in her first play, "Lord Byron." I can't make you acquainted with people in a line—only Kipling can do that—and a proper description of all our playwrights would fill a volume.

They are, for the most part, a quiet, unassuming lot, constituting, of course, the brains of the theater, and lacking wholly the pose and self-importance of their creature, the actor. They are of the stage, and yet singularly apart from it, the glare of the footlights being merged for them with the soft red glow of the library. I am glad to have been their press agent this little time, for the majority of them are almost unknown to the very throngs they entertain vicariously. The wig-maker has his name on the



*"Margaret Mayo built a villa from the
the proceeds of 'Polly of the Circus' "*

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program in larger letters than they, and the chorus girl receives infinitely more attention from the newspapers. More than any other class of men, I believe them to be actuated by the desire to do fine things. "I want to write plays that add to the joy of life!" exclaims one of the cult, looking over my shoulder. "I shall never write a play that does not contain something of hope and happiness!"

STAGE STRUCK

Being a diagnosis of the disease, and a description of its symptoms, which has the rare medical merit of attempting a cure at the same time.

“FROM the stern life of an officer in Uncle Sam’s Navy to a merry job carrying a spear in the chorus of a musical comedy may be a far cry”, but that is the step which a metropolitan newspaper recently recorded as having been taken by a young man named in the story whose beginning is quoted above. On another page of this same newspaper was an article which announced that “because pink teas, bridge whist, and dances no longer amused her”, a certain “society woman” had joined the chorus of a company appearing at the Casino. These two cases composed a single day’s list of casualties from the malignant disease known as stage-fever.

When my eye had finished its journey over



"The malignant disease"

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the accounts of the "society woman" and the naval officer, I paused to wonder whether either of these aspirants would be checked by seeing spread-headed over the first page of the journal in question the horrid details of a theatrical suicide. The night before, an actress of reputation—a woman who had won everything that these new-comers had but a faint chance of winning—had killed herself in an hotel in Baltimore. Of course, it had not been shown that this "star" was influenced by any circumstance connected with her work, and, of course, it is true that people of various professions are self-slain, and yet—I wondered.

If the naval officer was restrained in his resolve it was not for long. A week or so later I saw this impetuous youth, who couldn't stand "being bottled up on a battle-ship", on the stage of an up-town theater. He was standing near the middle of a row of young men, waving his hands at stated intervals, and singing "yes—yes" at the end of every second line rendered by the principal comedian. He had but

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to wave his hands a moment too soon or too late in order to incur a fine or a reprimand. Perhaps by this time he has discovered that there are worse misfortunes than being "bottled up on a battleship."

Whether he does or not, the stream of the stage-struck will continue to flow like the brook poeticized by Tennyson. There is no stopping it. Youth has a better chance of missing measles or scarlet-fever than of escaping that consuming passion to "go on the stage." Nearly everyone struggles with the mania for a time; the wise conquer it, the foolish make up the comic opera choruses, the unimportant road companies, and the stage-door-keeper's list of "extra ladies and gentlemen." From every class and walk of life, from every town and city troop the victims, abandoning their vocations and their homes, as though they had heard the witching notes of a siren song. They come with high hopes and bright dreams, most of them to the great, gay city of New York, where they besiege the agencies, and the managers,

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and the teachers of acting until their dreams fade, or their money gives out, or they are smitten with realization. There is hardly a community in the country so small as to be without its "amateur dramatic club", and no one even distantly connected with the theatrical profession has lacked his or her experience with the inoculated unfortunate who knows that "I could succeed if I only had a chance."

Some time ago I happened to be in Syracuse, and used the long-distance telephone to communicate with New York. My conversation over, I sat down in the hotel lobby, and had just lit a cigar when a page announced: "Long distance wants you." I returned to the booth. "Yes?" I inquired. A woman's voice replied: "I overheard enough of your talk with New York to judge that you're in the theatrical business."

"I'm indirectly connected with it", I replied.

"Well", said the voice, "I'm the long-distance operator, and I want to go on the stage. Please get me an engagement."

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I explained my misfortune in being acquainted with no manger who was likely to consider extensive training in enunciation of "hello" and "busy" sufficient education for the stage. The lady probably didn't believe me, for it is the popular impression that anyone concerned in the business of the playhouse has only to ask in order to receive a contract for whomever he wishes to assist. That song-heroine, who declared herself "an intimate friend of an intimate friend of Frohman", has her prototype in real life. Moreover, no aspirant to footlight honors ever can be convinced that actors must be made as well as born, and that there may be a few people in the world, who, given the opportunity, would not become Modjeskas and Mansfields.

William A. Brady once was served at dinner by a waitress whose surliness astonished him. He made no remark, however, and at last the waitress addressed him. "You're William A. Brady", she said; "ain't you?"

Mr. Brady confessed.



" 'You're *William A. Brady*,
ain't you?' "

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"Well", exclaimed the duchess of dishes, "my name's Minnie Clark. I've been a waitress since I was fourteen years old, and I think I can stand it until about next Wednesday. Give me a job, will you?"

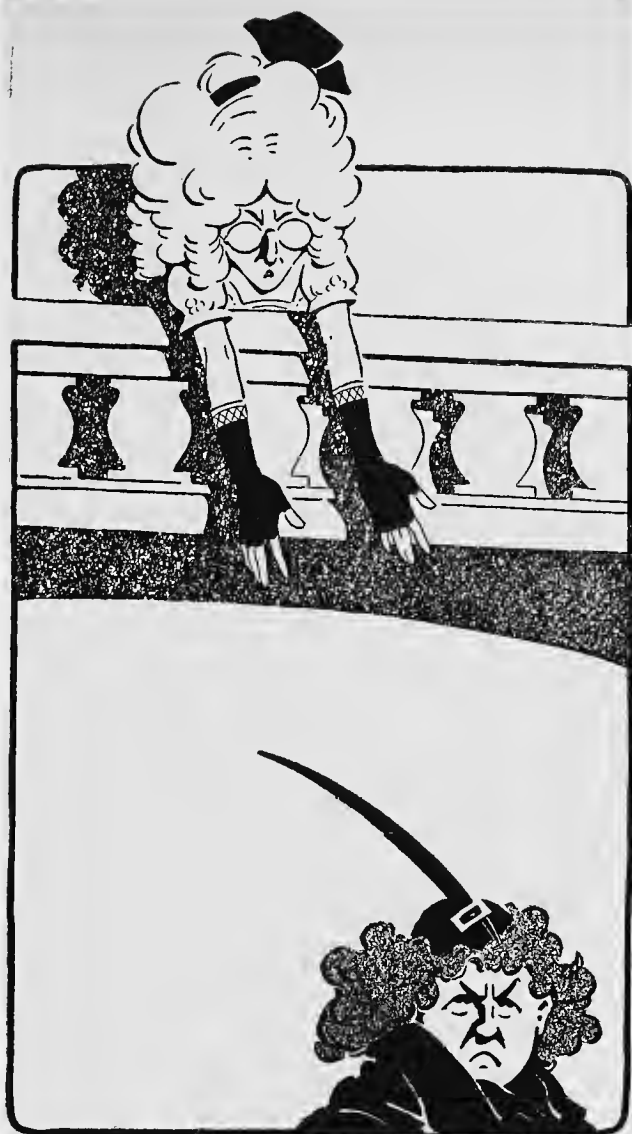
David Belasco had a less amusing experience with a chambermaid in Attleboro, Mass., where he spent a night with the organization supporting David Warfield in "The Auctioneer." This girl, whose tap at the door interrupted the wizard producer while he was blue-penciling a scene, had just heard of his presence in town, and lost no time approaching him. She had been stage-struck since childhood. Hearing of Mr. Belasco's success in teaching dramatic art, she had determined to visit him in New York. "I saved my money for three years", she said, "and then I went up to you. I called at your office every day, but they wouldn't let me in. When all my money was spent I came back home, and began saving again. I had about half enough when I found that you were coming to Attleboro." Mr. Belasco was unable to

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give the girl the least encouragement. She was wholly illiterate, and, moreover, her death warrant was writ on her face. She was suffering from an incurable disease of the lungs.

Collin Kemper, one of the managers of the Astor Theater, recently had a letter from an elderly priest, who, after twenty years in the pulpit, felt that he wanted "a larger field of expression", and yearned to play Shakespeare. A wrinkled old woman of sixty sought the late Edward Marble, when he was conducting a school of acting in Baltimore, and confided in him her desire to be seen as Juliet. This desire she had cherished nearly half a century when the death of a relative gave her the means of gratifying her ambition. Daniel Frohman once received a young man, who laid on his desk a letter of introduction from an acquaintance in the West. "Ah!" said Mr. Frohman. "So you wish to become an actor?"

"Yes", replied the young man. "I'm puh-puh-puh-perfectly wa-wa-willing to ba-ba-ba-begin at the ba-bottom—"



*"A wrinkled old woman
confided her desire to be seen as Juliet"*

STAGE STRUCK

He stuttered hopelessly.

The most astonishing feature of stage fever, however, is that its ravages are not confined to the ranks of people who would be bettered by success in their chosen profession. My wealthiest friend, a silk importer, who owns a charming home in Central Park West, dines alone while his wife stands in the wings of a dirty little theater in Paris, where their only daughter earns a hundred francs a week by dancing. A successful literary man of my acquaintance, who would cheerfully devote his entire income, something more than fifteen thousand a year, to making his young wife happy in his cozy apartment yields per force to her wish to appear in vaudeville. The most valuable member of the staff of an out-of-town newspaper, recipient of a big salary, suddenly threw up his position two years ago, since when he has been employed seven weeks, and that seven weeks in an organization presenting "The Chinatown Trunk Mystery."

A. L. Wilbur, at the time when he con-

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ducted the well-known Wilbur Opera Company, printed in the program of his performances an advertisement for chorus girls. Successful applicants were paid twelve dollars a week, yet recruits came by the dozens from the best families in the territory through which the aggregation was touring. Scores of the young women who play merry villagers on Broadway today are well born and bred victims of the virus. "Society" has contributed even to the ranks of the chorus men, whose caste is far below that of their betighted sisters. When Maybelle Gilman opened her metropolitan season in "The Mocking Bird" a male chorister, whose weekly stipend was eighteen dollars, electrified the management by purchasing nine boxes. This Croesus of the chorus proved to be "Deacon" Moore, a Cornell graduate and son of one of the biggest mine operators in the West.

The germ of stage fever frequently is as slow to get out of the system as it is quick to enter it. Douglas Fairbanks is a clever come-

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dian, who, after a long apprenticeship, has been elevated to the stellar rank by William A. Brady. Mr. Fairbanks fell in love with the daughter of Daniel J. Sully, and, according to report, was given parental permission to marry her if he would abandon his profession. Mr. Fairbanks retired from the stage, and was out of the cast of "The Man of the Hour" for a trifle less than two months. Margaret Fuller came to town a few years ago with an ambition to star. She enlisted the help of a well-known manager, who told her that he would give her a chance to play Camille if she could get rid of twenty pounds of superfluous flesh. Miss Fuller presented "Camille" at a special matinee, and has not been heard of since. She is still in the theatrical profession, content with minor roles, but clinging tenaciously to the vocation. There are hundreds of men and women haunting the agencies in New York, promenading that graveyard of buried hopes, The Great White Way, who might be enjoying the comfort of luxurious homes and the affection-

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ate care of doting relatives.

In nine cases out of ten the mania to go on the stage is prompted by pure desire for glorification. Love of excitement, and the fallacious notion that the profession is one of comparative ease and luxury, may be alloying factors, but the essence of the virus is vanity. No other field offers the same quick approval of successful effort, and no other climber is quite so much the center of his eventual triumph. In the other arts, approbation follows less promptly and is less direct. The fortunate player hears the intoxicating music of applause a dozen times every evening and two dozen times on matinee days. He struts about his mimic world, the observed of all observers, conscious of the strained attention of the thousands who have paid to see him, profiting not only by his own achievements but by those of the author, the director, the scene-painter and the orchestra. The newspapers are full of his praise and his photographs, recording his slightest doing and giving to the opinions ex-

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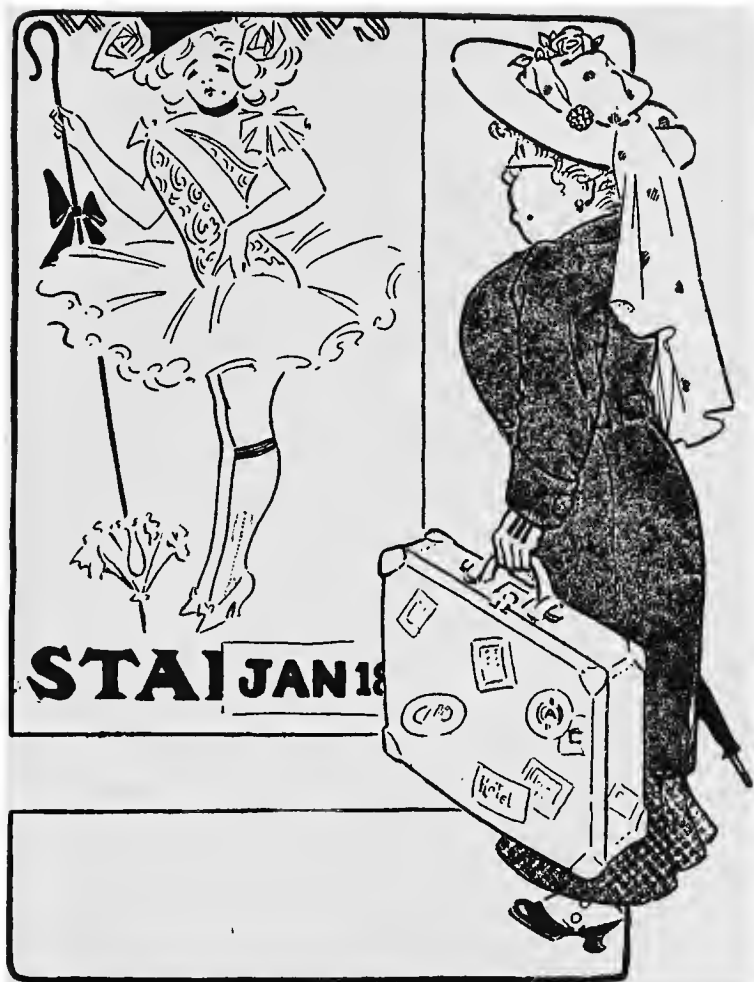
pressed by him, or by his press agent, an importance scarcely less than might be accorded the President of the United States. In the course of time he even begins to arrogate to himself the heroic virtues of the characters he impersonates. It is sweet to see one's name on the cover of a novel, sweet to scrawl one's autograph in the lower left-hand corner of a painting, but O, how doubly and trebly sweet to meet one's own image lithographed under a laudatory line and posted between advertisements of the newest breakfast food and the latest five cent cigar!

The temptation is the stronger, as the rewards are more numerous, if the aspirant happens to be a woman. The gentler sex may not have greater vanity than the stronger, but it takes greater delight in commendation and it has keener appreciation of luxury. If the much-mentioned "society belle" longs for the glitter and gaud supposed to exist behind the footlights, how can one blame the daughters of poverty and squalor who make up the rank

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and file of the chorus? James Forbes has embodied the minds of these girls in his Patricia O'Brien in "The Chorus Lady." What wonder that they try to escape the sordid commonplaces of their poor lives for the glory of the theater, and delight to strut their "brief hour" in a palace, even if that palace be of canvas and scantling? The prospect of diamonds and automobiles cannot exert a stronger appeal to the men and women who dwell in dreary drudgery than does the hope of becoming *somebody*, of enjoying even a temporary illumination of their obscurity.

Charles Dickens vividly explained the psychology of this longing for prominence in his chapter on "Private Theaters" in "Sketches by Boz." In his day there were scores of these institutions in London, each "the center of a little stage-struck neighborhood." In the lobby of each was hung a placard quoting the price for which willing amateurs might play certain desirable parts. To be the Duke of Glo'ster, in "Richard III", cost £2, the part being well



*"How sweet to meet one's
own image"*

STAGE STRUCK

worth that amount because "the Duke must wear a real sword, and, what is better still, he must draw it several times in the course of the piece." We have no such private theaters on this side of the water, but there are nearly two hundred amateur dramatic clubs in Brooklyn, while other communities possess these organizations in proportion to their size.

There are three well-trod roads to the stage. One wanders through membership in a society like those mentioned, another and straighter is by way of the dramatic schools, while the third, and most frequented, goes direct from the home to the office of agent or manager. Of dramatic schools the number is legion, but only those conducted by dishonest adventurers promise employment to the enrolled student. "Be an actor for \$1", is the alluring caption of an advertisement carried weekly by a number of periodicals, but the aspirants who make it profitable for that institution to go on advertising must be exceptionally gullible. New York has many "academies" in which useful techni-

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calities of the art are carefully taught, and the managers of several of these "academies" keep in close touch with the producing interests of the country. While they guarantee nothing, they frequently are able to place their graduates in small parts. Grace George, Margaret Illington, and other well-known stars have come out of these schools.

The direct path to which reference has been made is full of difficulties and obstacles. Agencies are established with the purpose of helping communication between managers and the actors most in demand. They are busy places, with little time to devote to the novice, and the average impresario is not more nearly inaccessible than their executive heads. Every year the producing manager is less inclined to see applicants or to make opportunities for people of whom he knows nothing. It is all very well to be recommended by some acquaintance of the man who "presents", but friendship is only friendship, and nobody will risk the success of a production that has cost thou-

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sands of dollars merely to please an associate. The current method of selecting a company is quick and simple. A copy of the play's cast is sent to the manager, who writes opposite each character the name of the actor whom he thinks most likely to interpret that role to advantage. Then the manager's secretary sends for the fortunate Thespian. This system is undeniably hard, and perhaps unjust to the beginner, but such sentiment as gets into the theater comes in manuscripts, and, in these days of severe critical judgment, the investor in drama has the fullest right to minimize his risk.

Out of every hundred tyros who come to town in search of an engagement ten may secure the coveted prize, and not more than one person out of that ten makes a decent living from his or her adopted profession. It is too much to say that one aspirant in a thousand achieves real success. The average salary in the chorus is \$18, and for speaking parts in dramatic performances it cannot be more than \$40. No one is paid during the period devoted to rehearsal, and a long

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season lasts somewhere between thirty and thirty-five weeks. The sane way of computing wages in the theatrical business, therefore, is to multiply by thirty and divide the result by fifty-two. Following this system, it will be seen that the seeming \$40 a week really is only \$23. The most ardent and ambitious among the stage-struck will admit that this is not an income permitting the employment of a chauffeur or the purchase of a palatial residence on Riverside Drive.

Nor is the matter of remuneration the only disappointment connected with entrance into the theatrical profession. This is the one vocation in which the worker must begin again every year. If the fairly-successful actor "gets something" for the current season, he will find almost equal difficulty in getting something else for the season to follow. Unless he has made a prodigious hit—and prodigious hits are very rare—he finds himself no farther advanced next June than he was last September. Should he be lucky enough to remain in New York, he

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occupies a hall room in a boarding house, and, failing in this doubtful good fortune, he faces a long term on "the road." Excepting only solitary confinement in prison, the world probably holds no terror surpassing that of touring the "one night stands." Lost to his best friends and companions, travelling at all hours of the day and night, grateful for board and lodging that would not be tolerated by a domestic servant, the player with a small road company has ample reason to repent his choice of a career. To illustrate the universal dread of this fate, I quote the lines printed under a comic picture in the Christmas issue of a prominent dramatic weekly:

DOCTOR—You're pretty badly run down, my friend. I should advise change of scene.

PATIENT—(Just returned from thirty weeks of "one night stands" with the Ripping Repertoire Company). Heaven have mercy on me! (He dies).

Of course, it is quite futile to recite facts like

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these to the victim of stage fever. That unhappy individual is certain that he or she will positively enjoy such discomforts as your feeble fancy can paint, and doubly sure that the ugly present will fade into a roseate future just as it does in the transformation scene at the end of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Tell this adventurer that one histrion in a thousand succeeds and your reply is bound to be: "I'll be that one." And, to speak truth, he or she *may* be that one. Celebrated actors are made from queer material sometimes, and the roster of well-known people on our stage includes the names of men and women who were originally plumbers, waitresses, floor-walkers and cloak-models. The beginner may be positive, however, that these players did not advance while they still had the intellects and the training required in the occupations mentioned. No person can possibly succeed on the dramatic stage without the foundation of genuine talent and a superstructure of culture and education. A woman whose pronunciation betrayed the baseness of her early

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environment could not win enduring fame if she had the temperament of a Bernhardt.

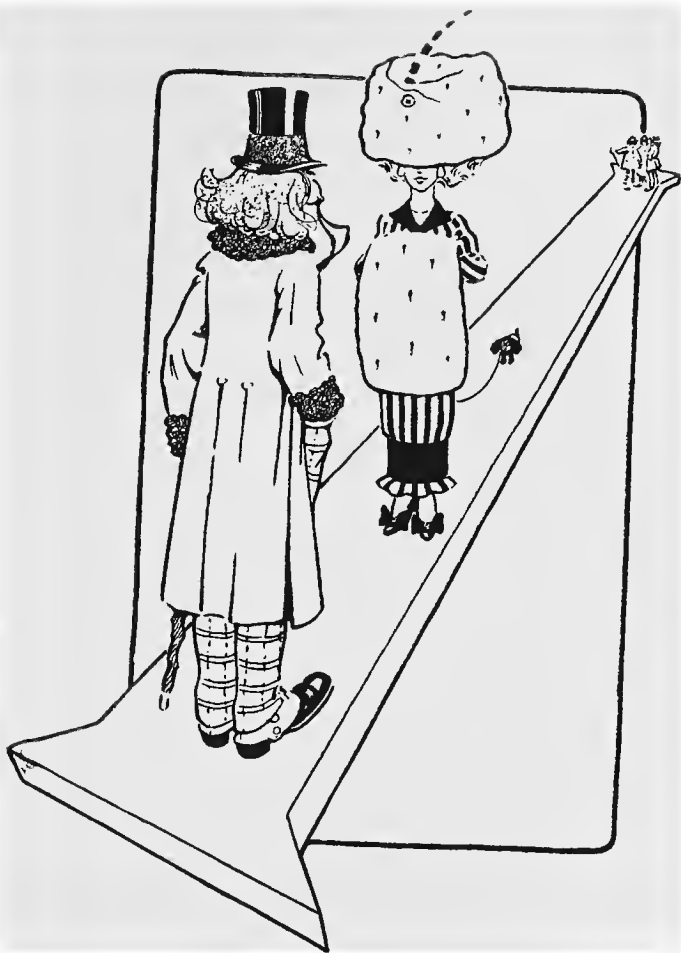
Generally, however, the woman who thinks she has the temperament of a Bernhardt really has only anaemia and a great deal of vanity. If she has not mistaken her symptoms, and, besides genuine ability, has a good education, some money, infinite patience, an iron constitution, and a mind made up to the bitterness of long waiting and constant disappointment, she may eventually win a position half as important and a fourth as agreeable as that which she pictured in her imagination.

She is far luckier if her desire to go on the stage proves akin to and as fleeting as the average small boy's desire to be a burglar.

ON THE GREAT WHITE WAY

Being an account of intrepid explorations in the habitat of the creatures whose habits are set forth in the preceding chapters.

THE Great White Way is a recumbent letter I. It is recumbent because the *habitués* of the Rialto have used it to the point of exhaustion, and because streets are never vertical except in Naples. The Rialto is the name by which The Great White Way was known before the present reckless mania for electric signs suggested the more significant appellation. In that long-ago time one who spoke of the district in question referred to Broadway between the Star Theatre and the office of The Dramatic Mirror. The Great White Way is bounded on the South by the Flatiron Building, on the West by the Metropolitan Opera House, on the North by an enormous incandescent spread-eagle advertising a certain kind of beer, and on the East by the



*"The Great White Way is
a recumbent letter I"*

ON THE GREAT WHITE WAY

Actors' Society. Around these material landmarks runs an invisible but insurmountable wall of clannishness and complacent self-satisfaction. To be on the Great White Way you have only to leave the Subway at Times Square; to be of it you must follow the Biblical camel through the eye of a needle.

There isn't another Great White Way on the face of the earth. Paris has its Place d' l'Opera, London its Strand, and Vienna its Ringstrasse, but these resemble New York's theater path only as a candle resembles an arc light. They are streets given up to seekers after pleasure; the Rialto is a street given up to seekers after pleasure, and to seekers after seekers after pleasure. It is not the moths attracted to the flame that lend particular interest to the Great White Way; it is the flame itself, coruscating, scintillant, multi-hued and glowing. Broadway, within the limits set down, is a street of players and playhouses; the only mile of pavement in the world devoted entirely to the members of one profession.

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Two newspaper buildings rear themselves defiantly in this portion of New York. They seem out of place, though newspaper men are night-workers, too, and come nearer than any other class of men to being *of* The Great White Way. A few tailors and haberdashers have intruded themselves into the district, settling beside wig makers and sellers of grease paint, but they are neither numerous nor ostentatious. Broadway, as you walk from Twenty-third Street to Forty-seventh, unfolds itself to the view as a line of theaters, theatrical offices, agencies and all-night restaurants. Outsiders go there to see performances and to eat; insiders make of it a world of their own—a queer little, blear little world of unclear visions, abnormal instincts, unreal externals and astigmatic sense of proportion.

Parisians call their actors "*M'as-tu-vu*", which means "Have you seen me?" That is because the first question a French actor asks is "Have you seen me in such-and-such a role?" Your true American actor doesn't waste

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time with a question of that sort. He feels a peaceful certainty that not to know him argues yourself unknown, and he wouldn't like to hint at such obscurity for an acquaintance. Take all the talk of all the year on The Great White Way; run it through a wringer, and you will have that same letter I, with vanity dripping from every inch of the texture. Such egotism as the rest of creation entertains is watered brandy to that of the Thespian. He thinks of only one thing, he can talk of only one thing, all the affairs in the world are inconsequential in comparison with that one thing, and that one thing is himself. Stand at my elbow while I halt my friend Junius B. Starr at the corner of Fortieth and Broadway. "How are you, old man?" say I.

"Fine", is his reply. "Been playing the 'heavy' with Florence Rant since November. Everybody said I 'hogged the show.' "

Half a block farther along we will have occasion to mention a business matter to Sue Brette. "My agent tells me you would go into

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vaudeville if you had a 'sketch.' She mentioned the possibility of my writing one for you."

"Yes. I spoke to her about your giving me a part like the one I played in 'The Greatness of the Small.' You know that was the engagement I lost because I was so much better than the leading woman. She took the piece off and revived 'Across the Divide', and I handed in my notice. The play ended with me dancing on the table—"

Twenty minutes later we saunter on with a store of minute information regarding Miss Brette's performance, and how it was enjoyed by the world at large, but with our minds still in Darkest Africa so far as the business of the meeting is concerned.

Most people are self-conscious when they speak highly of themselves. Not so actors, to whom such statements as "Everybody said I was the best they had ever seen" or "Alan Dale came three nights running just to watch me" are simply a matter of course. Long thought in this strain has so accustomed the people of the



*"The actor sees himself so
large, and the rest of
the world so small"*

ON THE GREAT WHITE WAY

stage to talking in the same fashion that they find nothing extraordinary about it. Then, too, his distorted sense of proportion makes the actor see himself so large and the rest of the world so small that he cannot conceive of any mind which will not grasp, with unalloyed delight, at first-hand information regarding himself. Newspapers have flattered your average histrion into the idea that an eager humanity waits impatiently for accounts of his most unimportant doings. During the term of my press agency, a certain comedienne whose specialty is burnt cork ran after me along Broadway one afternoon, crying: "Stop! I've got a great news 'story' for you."

I stopped. "What is it?" I inquired.

"A man came up to me as I was leaving the stage door and said: 'Why, you're not really colored, after all!'"

A star of my acquaintance recently dismissed an excellent business manager because that individual mentioned the author of the play in his advertising. "You're not working for

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Scribble; you're working for me", was his comment. Another has ceased to be a friend because I told him that I didn't care for his performance. A third has clippings of the criticisms that have treated him best pasted on the inside of his card case and shows them to you if he can get your ear and your button-hole.

Everybody talks shop a good deal, but shop is the *only* thing talked on The Great White Way. Art and science and literature, politics and wars and national calamities have no interest, if they have so much as existence, for the player. "Awful catastrophe that earthquake in 'Frisco!" I exclaimed to an intimate I met at breakfast five or six years ago.

"By George, yes!" said he. "Costs me twenty weeks I had booked over the Orpheum Circuit."

Your shoe dealer, though he converses about shoes from eight in the morning until six at night, at least drops the subject during the evening. The typical histrion reads nothing in the papers except the theatrical news and re-



"Alan Dale came three nights running"

ON THE GREAT WHITE WAY

fuses steadfastly to discourse on any other subject. This is equally true of the manager.

The theatrical world is as much of and to itself as though the Rialto were a tiny island isolated in the waters of the Pacific. It has its own language, its own daily journal, its own celebrities and its own great events. The jargon spoken would be absolutely unintelligible to a layman. "I doubled the heavy and a character bit because the Guv'ner said cuttin' everything down was our only chance to stay out. We hit 'em hard in Omaha, and it looked like a constant sell out to me, but the Guv'ner swore the show was a frost and we was playin' to paper." What would be your translation of this, gentle reader? Doesn't sound like English, does it? Yet it is—English as you hear it on Broadway.

The Telegraph is the organ of the theatrical profession. It is a morning paper published at midnight for the benefit of a clientele that has plenty of time for reading between that hour and bed time. The Telegraph is the connecting

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link between the last editions of the "yellow" evening papers, most of which, by the way, are pink, and the "bull dog editions" of the regular morning papers. It is the one daily in the world devoted exclusively to sport and the theater. To its editorial staff and its readers a declaration of war between England and France wouldn't be worth half the space given to a street fight between two matinee idols. The followers of this journal might be a trifle shaky as to the identity of Christopher Wren, but they could answer without hesitation any question relating to "Ted" Marks. They are awake to conditions, physical and domestic, utterly strange to outsiders, and understand personal allusions that would be Greek to the best-informed editorial writer on The London Times. If you picked up a newspaper and read "Famous Sayings of Great Men—Charles Hepner Meltzer: 'If it's hair it's here' " you would be mystified, yet fifty thousand theatrical people read that quip on the day of its publication and laughed at it heartily.

ON THE GREAT WHITE WAY

The populace of The Great White Way is not more sharply individual in its mentality than in its personality. You could not possibly mistake the types that congregate on street corners or shuttle to and fro on business bent. The stoutish, smooth-shaven, commonplace-looking young fellow who passes you with a stride is a well-known dramatic author whose latest play is in its third month at a near-by theater. The long-haired man behind him whom you notice because of his deep-set eyes, his tapering fingers and his important bearing is not the great genius that you may suppose him, but an ambitious provincial come to town to market his first comedy. Sybilla Grant, whose real name is Carrie O'Brien, and who gets eighteen dollars per week for wearing a five hundred dollar gown conspicuously in the chorus at the Casino, drives to the door of Rector's, while the most prosperous and profitable woman star in America walks quietly down Broadway, a demure little figure in a gray tailor-made gown. The old actor, with frayed linen and threadbare suit,

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idles about, a trifle the worse for liquor, inquiring after opportunities; the young actor flaunts along in company with a well known theatrical lawyer or a soubrette conspicuous for the fearfulness and wonderfulness of her millinery and her coiffure. Dogs you see in plenty, attached and unattached, but no children. The Great White Way is a childless path.

There are so many celebrities on Broadway that, if you are a familiar of the street, you cease to regard them with awe. Men and women whose names fill newspapers and whose pictures crowd magazines meet you at every turn. During the hour's time required for lunching I have seen in one hotel eating room Henry Arthur Jones, Charles Klein, John Kendrick Bangs, Winthrop Ames, George Ade, Paul West, Edgar Selwyn, Roy McCardell, Victor Herbert, Reginald De Koven, Raymond Hubbell, Manuel Klein, Archie Gunn, Hy. Mayer, David Warfield, Frank Keenan, Robert Hilliard, William Faversham, Wilton Lackaye, Theodore Roberts, Henry Miller,



*"Gets eighteen dollars per
week for wearing a five
hundred dollar gown"*

ON THE GREAT WHITE WAY

Arnold Daly, W. H. Crane, Francis Wilson, Edmund Breese, Henry Woodruff, Sam Bernard, Charles J. Ross, Daniel Frohman, Henry B. Harris, Lee Shubert, Fred W. Whitney, Charles B. Dillingham, J. W. Jacobs, Ben Roeder, David Belasco, Joseph Brooks, Marc Klaw and Abraham L. Erlanger. The gentleman who was sharing my table called attention to the gathering and remarked that if the building should tumble about our ears, the result would be temporary paralysis in theatricals.

The Great White Way has certain hostelries at which certain classes in "the profession" lunch, dine and sup habitually. Nearly every manager of importance in New York goes to the Knickerbocker, the Madrid, or to Rector's, the former place being popular also with the better sort of actors. Shanley's, the Astor, the Cadillac, Browne's Chop House and Keene's, which is in the old home of the Lambs Club, also are popular, while the faster set, notably including the well known women of musical comedy, affect Churchill's. In the vi-

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cinity of The Times Building, and again in the neighborhood of The Herald, are a number of little restaurants in which unlucky players and very busy managers can get food cheaply and quickly. These places are to be recognized generally by the white enamel lettering on their windows and by the fact that they employ women as waiters. The busy manager aforesaid goes into them fearlessly; the unlucky player contents the inner man in the rear of the room and then stands complacently smoking his five cent cigar in front of the more expensive eating-house next door.

There is the same divergence of character in lodging places on the Rialto. Above Forty-second Street one finds fashionable apartment houses in which prominent players keep rooms the year around. Farther down are hotels in which the less-successful histrion stops when he is in town, and the cross streets still closer to the foot of the The Great White Way are full of theatrical boarding houses, in which a good room may be had at four dollars per week and

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food and lodging at sums varying from seven to ten dollars. The four clubs that appeal especially to "the profession" are the Lambs, the Players, the Greenroom and the Friars. The first of these is the most expensive, the most luxurious, and the most liked by the gilded set. It occupies a new and beautiful building on Forty-fourth Street near Broadway. The Players, founded by Edwin Booth, is quiet, conservative and elegant, inhabiting now, as it did in the beginning, an old-fashioned structure in Gramercy Park. The Greenroom Club and The Friars are younger and crowd themselves into less pretentious quarters on Forty-seventh and Forty-fifth Streets. The Greenroom caters especially to managers, and The Friars was founded by press agents.

The theaters near Broadway are too well known to call for much comment. They include all the playhouses of the better class, about thirty-five in number, beginning with Wallack's and ending with the New Theater. A great majority of the big—I'm not alluding to

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physical appearance—producers have their executive offices in these Temples of Thespis. The Knickerbocker Theater Building shelters many of them, as do the Broadway Theater Building, the Gaiety Theater Building and the Putnam Building. Charles Frohman works in a tidy and well furnished apartment in the Empire Theater Building, which is tenanted almost exclusively by his staff. The Shuberts have headquarters in what was once the Audubon Hotel, opposite the Casino, at Broadway and Thirty-ninth Street, and Klaw and Erlanger transact their business in the New Amsterdam Theater Building. The New York Theater Building, the Hudson Theater Building, the George M. Cohan Theater Building, the Astor Theater Building, and even that home of burlesque, the Columbia Theater Building, all are honey-combed with offices.

The word "honey-combed" is used advisedly. All day long, all year 'round these offices are veritable hives of business. The layman has not the least conception of the amount of

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activity necessary to theatrical production. It is not too much to say that such an office as that of Klaw & Erlanger is visited by no fewer than two thousand persons *per diem* and that as many letters are dispatched from it. Such buildings as those mentioned are most crowded from July to December. Regardless of the fact that theatrical companies are made up nowadays almost entirely by the process of sending for the players who are wanted, thousands of men and women in search of work begin their annual promenade late in June. They wait patiently, hour after hour, in outer offices, where the men usually find seats and the women generally stand. The matinee idol who last season nightly shouldered the blame for a great crime in order to shield the brother of the girl he loved, pushes past scores of girls somebody loves in order to be first before the desk of the manager. Through the long summer months, The Great White Way, whiter than ever in the dazzling heat of the sun, is thronged with seekers after employment in the most over-

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crowded profession in the world. From place to place they go, from manager's office to agency, securing nothing more definite than the suggestion that they leave their names and addresses.

Of late the Rialto in summer has been so crowded with loungers that a special squad of police has been required to keep the way open to ordinary pedestrains. Knots of players, the men recognizable by their smooth-shaven faces and mobile mouths, the women by that peculiar independence of convention which characterizes the feminine portion of "the profession", group themselves everywhere. Seeing a hub of people, with projecting spokes made up of dogs on strings, you may be quite sure of the conversation. "I could 'a' been with 'Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford', but everybody had it touted for a failure, so I signed for stock in Minneapolis. We only lasted two weeks. If the manager'd had any nerve, I think we'd 'a' won out. The whole town was talking about my work in 'Salomy Jane', and, my dear, you know what I

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could 'a' done in 'Brewster's Millions'!"

The soil most favorable to the growth of these groups is in front of the Actors' Society, the Metropolitan Opera House, the Knickerbocker Theater Building, and the Putnam Building. The "sportier" class of men congregate before the Hotel Albany, where they coolly ogle the women who pass. Never by any chance does one find a manager in a gathering like this—not even a salaried manager or a press agent. "Hold themselves aloof", you think; and they do, not only from these folk of the lower crust, but from the best class of actors as well. Race hatred and political prejudice are as nothing in comparison with the feeling between the business man of the theater and the player. Each despises the other, more or less secretly, and, except on the neutral ground of the Lambs', each "herds" alone.

The Great White Way is most nearly deserted at nine in the morning. Then the rounder has gone to bed and the workman has not yet risen. Surface cars laden with human-

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ity pass and repass, but they do not disgorge in the Rialto. The shop doors yawn widely, displaying blank faces to the straggling typists who wander by. Hotel dining-rooms are deserted, chairs piled upon the tables, and sleepy waiters leaning disconsolately against the walls. Lowered curtains betray the tardiness of the people whose duty it is to open the offices of agents, play-brokers, and managers. Even the theater lobbies are vacant. Ten o'clock brings prosperous-looking men, hustling to and fro; and eleven sees the beginning of the actors' parade. By noon Broadway is a river of humanity, flowing steadily to the sea of Ambition.

It is not until night, however, that it becomes clear why the street should have the name that has been given it. Then the hundreds of queer-looking signs you have seen through the day suddenly take on light and life; burning blue birds fly "for happiness", glittering chariot-horses race beneath illuminative memoranda of the virtues of table waters, sparkling wine pours itself iridescently into a glowing glass;

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millions of little electric jewels flash in the darkness; whole buildings burst into premeditated flame; facades blaze like giant fireworks ignited for a festival; and Broadway becomes in truth The Great White Way. Standing beside The Herald Building and staring northward, one sees a horizontal tower of glistening globes, the "river of humanity" with a wonderful electric display on its banks. The cars now begin to give up throngs from their lighted interiors, pedestrians block the sidewalks, policemen shrill their regulation of traffic, at Forty-second Street and Seventh Avenue the crush of carriages is well-nigh impassible. Fifty thousand people pour into the playhouses, to pour out again three hours later, super-man to become supper man, and to add his grandeur, and his lady's, to the crowded lobster palaces that line this dazzling path of pleasure. These are darkened in time, and there are left only the all-night restaurants. The streets grow quiet, and the pink dawn, unseen save by the watchmen, unfolds itself over the house-tops. One

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by one the stars disappear, fading into the day,
as will those other stars, so little, so infinitesimal,
so transient a part of that tiny world
which they in their vainglory have christened
The Great White Way.

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Being something about the process by which performances are got ready for the pleasure of the public and the profit of the ticket speculators.

“**Y**OU see, I’ve been fishing, too.”

“Hello! Only you—”

“Wait! Mr. Leeds, I’ve told you a dozen times to count five before that entrance!”

“I thought I—”

“Never mind what you thought! Go back! Now!”

“Hello! Only you two here! What’s become of—”

“Wait! . . . Flynn, take this entrance for the sunset cue. Dim your borders and throw in your reds. . . . Now, Mr. Leeds, once more!”

Doesn’t make sense, does it? Yet this is a commonplace passage from an ordinary dress rehearsal. Anybody really connected with thea-

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tricals could translate the extract at a glance, but intimate knowledge of the stage, and its language, is gained only by actual experience. Of the method of producing plays, more has been written and less is generally understood than of any other common process. The outsider who devotes an hour to watching a rehearsal is as well qualified to describe that function as you or I, after seeing a ship steam down the bay, would be to pen a treatise on the science of navigation.

Most laymen have a vague idea that theatrical performances spring into being full-fledged, like birds which prestidigitators hatch by the simple expedient of shooting at the cage. If this statement seems far-fetched, you have but to read the stories of the playhouse written by clever men, like O. Henry and Hamlin Garland, whose wide knowledge of most things under the sun does not seem to extend to things under the calcium.

Rehearsals are much more than aimless walking and talking, as navigation is more than

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the turning of a wheel. Their direction is a fine art, a very fine art, not the least unlike the painting of a miniature, and one must comprehend something of this art to explain or describe it.

There are many points of similarity between a performance and a painting, which must create an impression without reminding the spectator of the brush-strokes which made that impression possible. The preparation of a play is a succession of details. It is astonishing how small a thing can cause the success or failure, if not of the whole work, at least of an incident or an episode. A pause, a movement, an expression, a light or a color may defeat or carry out the intention of the dramatist.

William Gillette's melodrama, "Secret Service", has a scene in which a telegraph operator, dispatching military orders, is shot in the hand. When the piece was given its initial hearing, Mr. Gillette, in the role of the operator, upon receiving the wound (1) bandaged his hand with a handkerchief, (2) picked up

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his cigar, and (3) went on "sending." There was no applause. The second night the "business" was changed. The operator (1) picked up the cigar, (2) bandaged his hand, and (3) went on "sending." The audience was vociferous in its approval. This particular instance of the importance of trifles is easily explained. That a wounded man's first thought should be to care for the wound is not remarkable, but that his first thought should be of his cigar suggests pluck and intrepidity which the spectators were quick to appreciate. Frequently, however, author and actors experiment for months before finding the thing that makes or mars a desired effect.

The play-goer who believes himself a free agent does not understand the art of the theater. That art being perfect, he restrains his laughter and waits with his applause until the precise moment when the stage director wants him to laugh or applaud. It often happens that a laugh may spoil a dramatic situation, or that applause may not be desirable at a par-

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ticular time. For example, if an audience is permitted to vent its enthusiasm over some stirring incident just before the end of an act the applause after the act will be appreciably less, and the number of curtain calls will be smaller. It is a simple matter of mechanics to "kill" a laugh or a round of applause, just as, in many cases, the impression made by an actor in a situation may depend, not upon himself, but upon a detail of stage direction.

When two actors have an important dialogue, each wants to stand farther "up stage"—which is to say farther from the footlights—than the other, because the person farthest "up stage" is most likely to dominate the scene. "It's no use", I once heard William A. Brady say to a veteran, who was rehearsing with a young woman star. "She knows the tricks as well as you do, and she'll back through the wall of the theater before she'll give you that scene!"

The position of the player being of such consequence, it will be seen at once that actors do not, as is commonly believed, roam about

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the stage at will. In point of fact, they are practically automata, reflecting the brain-pictures of the director and working out his scheme. It is not unusual for the man in charge of a rehearsal to instruct one of his puppets to "take six steps to the right at this speech", or to "come down stage four steps." No person in a performance ever "crosses" another person—that is, passes behind or in front of that other person—without having been told just when and how to do so. That movement which seems least premeditated often has been most carefully planned, and you may be sure that, at the performance you are witnessing, everybody on the stage knows to the fraction of a yard where he or she will be standing at a given moment. Edwin Booth's reply to a novice who inquired where he should go during a long speech—"Wherever you are I'll find you"—would not be possible from a stage director of today.

While this pre-arrangement may appear to the layman to be opposed to any semblance of

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life and spontaneity, it is absolutely necessary to the giving of a smooth performance. If actors really "felt their parts" they would be about as dependable as horses that "feel their oats", and the representation in which they took part would soon become utterly chaotic. Fancy the awkwardness of Bassanio, in the trial scene of "The Merchant of Venice", looking around to find Shylock before inquiring: "Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?"

Nor would this uncertainty be the worst effect of such unpreparedness. On the stage every move, every gesture means something; conveys some impression. Thus, in a dialogue in which one character is defying another, a single step backward will produce the effect of cowardice, or at least of weakness and irresolution, in the person who retreats. The whole tension of a scene may be lost if one of the parties to it so much as glances down or reaches out for some necessary article.

In the enactment of "The Traitor", a dramatization of the novel by Thomas Dixon, Jr.,

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we found that a certain passage between the "lead", or hero, and the "heavy", or villain, failed of its intended effect. The hero, John Graham, is brought into court handcuffed, and seated in the prisoners' dock. Steve Hoyle goes to him with a taunt. It was thought veracious, even suggestive of manliness, that Graham, hearing the taunt, should rise angrily, as though prevented only by his bonds from striking his foe. After two weeks of guessing and experimenting, we discovered that this very natural movement, for some reason still inexplicable, gave the impression of weakness. It is minutæ like this that must be considered at rehearsal, and taught so carefully that the actor moves, as it were, in a groove, swerving from the determined course only as a needle in a sewing machine swerves in its downward stroke.

Accent and facial expression are planned by the stage director with the same absolutism that marks his attention to manœuvre. Few actors can be counted upon to read every line intelligently, and frequently the person in charge must



"If actors really 'felt their parts' "

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stop a rehearsal to point out an underlying thought. "You blur that speech", the director may say to the actor. "You don't define the changes of thought which it implies. See here! Jones says: 'I'll go to her with the whole story.' You listen. Your first emotion is surprise. 'You will?' Suspicion enters your mind. 'Then you——' The suspicion becomes certainty. 'Then you love her, too!' " Thus, more frequently than will be believed by the hero-worshipper, the much admired tone in which some big speech is delivered is the tone of the teacher.

So much, so very much, may depend upon the emphasis given a single word. The art of speaking, however, is not more part and parcel of a perfect performance than the art of listening. The director not only rehearses the manner of giving a sense, but the manner of receiving it. He must note pronunciations, too, and, if there is an odd or foreign name in the play, he must take care that all his people pronounce it alike. The length of pauses, the tempo of comic or se-

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rious conversations, the light and shade of the entire representation depend upon his competence.

Drama is the Greek word for action, and so, in a play, what the people *do* is even more important than what they *say*. Practically every motion made on the stage, except that of walking, comes under the head of what is known technically as "business." Laymen who believe that mummers act on their own initiative, even "making up" lines as they go along, will be surprised to learn that the manuscript of a workmanlike play contains more "business" than dialogue. The performer picks up a photograph or lights a cigar or toys with a riding whip, not because it has occurred to him to do so, but because the author has written down what he must do, and how and when he must do it, and the stage director has taught him properly to interpret the author.

Here is a page from the "prompt copy" of "Clothes." The unbracketed sentences are dialogue; those in parenthesis are "business":

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WEST.

I'm going to marry you in spite of ——

(Checks himself suddenly. Gets his hat and brushes it with his sleeve. Laughs a little.)

Pardon me. My temper is a jack-in-the-box. The cover is down again. Goodnight.

(Walks quickly to door L. C., and exits.

OLIVIA stands still a moment, then throws herself into chair R., of table, and indulges in a torrent of tears. The bell rings. She sits upright and listens. It rings again. She rises and runs to door L. 2. E. The MAID enters.)

The capital letters—L. C., R., and L. 2. E. are abbreviations of terms that indicate exact spots on the stage. You see, it is not left to the discretion of West by which door he shall leave the room, nor of Olivia into which chair she shall throw herself. This “business” the director works over at rehearsal, elaborating, amplifying, making clear. West is told precise-

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ly where he must find his hat, with which arm he must brush it, in what tone he must laugh. If this were a case where a pause would heighten the effect of an entrance, the maid would be informed, as was the mythical Mr. Leeds in my opening paragraphs, how many she must count, which is to say how long she must wait, before entering.

The more experienced an author, the more definite, exhaustive and significant his "business." When a play goes into rehearsal, however, there are always places where speech may be exchanged for action, and often, after a dramatist has seen his work on the stage, he is able to cut whole pages, the sense of which is made clear by the appearance, the manner, or the "business" of his people.

There are various kinds of "business", and of different purpose. The old-fashioned stage director used to invent dozens of meaningless things for actors to do, merely to "fill in", or give the appearance of activity. It is related that, when the farce, "It's All Your Fault", was

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being rehearsed, the man in charge insisted that Charles Dickson, who was supposed to be calling at the room of a friend, should "fill in" a long speech by taking a brush from a bureau drawer and brushing his hair.

"But", protested Mr. Dickson, "I'm simply visiting. I can't use another man's brush."

"Can't help that!" said the director. "There are long speeches here, and you must do *something* while they are being spoken."

This kind of stage management, however, is no longer general. It is understood now that the best way to make a speech impressive is to stand still and speak it, so that actors are not often given by-play without some good reason.

"Business" may supply "atmosphere", as the spectacle of a man rubbing his ears and blowing on his hands helps create the illusion of intense cold. In the original production of "In the Bishop's Carriage", Will Latimer, impersonated by a very slight young fellow, was supposed to cove Tom Dorgan, a thug of enormous bulk. The scene never carried conviction. until our

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stage director hit upon an ingenious bit of "business." He put a telephone on the table that stood between the two men. Dorgan made a movement toward Latimer. Latimer, without flinching or taking his eyes from Dorgan's face, laid his hand on the telephone. That gesture suggested a world of power, the police station within reach, law and society standing back of Latimer. It saved the situation.

Much "business" is obvious and essential, as Voysin's fumbling in his wife's dressing table, in "The Thief", since this fumbling leads to the discovery of the bills upon the purloining of which the play is built. If a small article is to be used importantly in a performance it must be "marked", so that the audience will know what it is and so that it will not seem to have appeared miraculously to fit the occasion. The paper cutter falls off the table in the first act of "The Witching Hour", not by accident, but by carefully thought out design, so that the audience will know where the instrument is and recognize it when Clay Whipple uses it to kill

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Tom Denning. "Business", in a word, may be the smashing of a door or the picking up of a pin. It is the adornment that makes an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative seem real; that translates mere dialogue into the semblance of every-day life.

Many plays—even most plays—are substantially altered at rehearsal. Dion Boucicault, the great Irish dramatist, said: "Plays aren't written; they are rewritten." It has been proved utterly impossible to judge the effect of a play from the manuscript, to know the merit of any story or episode until it is visualized, translated into action. Some time ago, William Gillette finished a farce, "That Little Affair at Boyd's", to which he had devoted the greater part of a year, and in which, therefore, he must have had considerable faith. Yet, after a week's rehearsal, he dismissed the company engaged and abandoned the idea of producing the piece. The soundness of his judgment was demonstrated later when this farce, re-christened "Ticey", was revived and failed utterly.

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When defects manifest themselves at rehearsal, the director does not hesitate to make or to suggest changes, the directness of his course depending upon the standing of his author. No dramatist is a hero to his stage director. Also, while we're parodying maxims, it's a wise author that knows his own play on its first night.

The playwright is quick to learn humility. "Who's that meek-looking chap?" somebody once asked Augustin Daly during the course of a trial performance. "That!" returned Daly. "Oh, that's only the author!" If a director is employed, the writer makes his suggestions through that gentleman. Sometimes the experience of the producer, who brings a fresh mind to the subject, is surer than the instinct of the author, who may easily have lost sense of perspective from long association with his work.

"The Three of Us", a well-known domestic comedy, depends for its chief interest upon a scene in the third act, where Rhy MacChesney pays a midnight visit to Louis Berresford. When the piece was put into rehearsal, the idea was

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that Berresford, hearing a knock at the door, bade the girl hide herself, which she did, only to be discovered later. George Foster Platt, the stage director, who recently filled that post at the New Theater, objected that this was trite, conventional, unnecessary. "Why shouldn't the young woman tell the truth—that she came on a perfectly legitimate errand, meaning no harm, and that she has nothing to fear—and refuse to hide?" The author adopted his view, a new scene was written, and the play, largely because of the unexpectedness of this turn of affairs, ran for an entire year at the Madison Square.

The knowledge of the stage director must cover the mechanical features of production as well as the literary. It is essential that he should understand the full value of light and scenic effects, and how to produce them. A stage may be, and generally is, illuminated by means of five different devices—from the "borders", which are directly overhead; from calciums, in the balcony or on either side of the stage; from spot lights, which really are calciums whose light is

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focused upon one spot; from footlights, and from "strips", which are placed wherever light from more remote sources would be obstructed.

The "borders" are long, inverted troughs, stretching from the extreme left of the stage to the extreme right and suspended from the roof of the theater. When it is said that the light coming from the "borders", or, indeed, from anywhere else, may be raised or lowered, may be white or blue or red or amber, or a combination of these colors, reproducing the glow of a lamp, or the first gray glimmer of sunrise, it will be understood that the director has a wide range of effects at his command.

Just as the reading of a line may alter the impression created by an entire passage, so may the least variation in illumination. Comedy scenes, for example, must be played in full light, as sentimental scenes are helped by half lights. If you could witness the second act of "Charley's Aunt" performed in the steel blue of moonlight, and the last act of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" in the glare of "full up", you would be amazed

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at the result.

Color has as subtle an influence. I have seen the people in a play fairly melt into the background of a yellow setting, causing their action to seem vague and illy-defined. Augustus Thomas' "The Harvest Moon" had a scene in which the same subject matter was repeated successively in different settings. Unless you had witnessed this performance, you would hardly believe how wholly unlike were the impressions produced. Costumes and music have an equal portence, and both call for the exercise of nice discretion.

The personality of the stage director, and his manner at rehearsal, are vital considerations. In acting, more than in any other art, the feeling of the artist reaches through his work. Everyone who has watched rehearsals has come to the conclusion, at one time or another, that actors are something less than human. As a matter of fact they are simply children, calling for the patience, the forbearance, and the flexibility of view-point necessary in a nursery. Wholly self-centered, hav-

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ing little contact with the outside world, their standards, their emotions, their false valuations make constant difficulties for the man who has to play upon them as upon a piano.

The dramatic instinct and the egregious ego form a provoking blend. I have known an actress, at a dress rehearsal, the night before the public performance of a play, to go into violent hysterics, apparently reduced to a nervous wreck by the strain of her work. "Great heavens!" I have said to the director; "she won't be able to appear tomorrow." "Acting, my boy", that gentleman would reply. "Acting for our benefit and her own. She'll be all right in ten minutes." And in ten minutes this same woman, done with her scene, would be advancing most logical reasons why she should have somebody's dressing room and why somebody else should have been given her's. I don't know exactly what temperament is, but most actors think they have it.

Player folk are full of superstitions, and many of these relate to rehearsal. Few actors will

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speak the "tag", or last line, of a play until its premiere. If that line were spoken the play would fail. Managers are not exempt from similar ideas, a mixture of ignorance and experience. A good final rehearsal is supposed to forecast a bad first performance, and this notion is not without reason, since the people, made sure of themselves, are pretty certain to lose the tension of nervousness. When the actors like a play at rehearsal the manager grows fearful. An actor usually likes best the play in which he has the best part, and that is not invariably the best play.

Small, indeed, is the share of glory that goes to "the power behind the throne." His name adorns no bill-boards, and, on the program, you will find it most frequently among the announcements that the shoes came from Hammersmith's or that the wigs are by Stepner. The manager knows the stage director, though, and respects him, reputation of this kind being more profitable than reputation with the great, careless public.

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Some few managers, like David Belasco and Collin Kemper, attend to the staging of their own productions, and, indeed, are most noted for their skill in this work. Many authors, among the number Augustus Thomas, James Forbes and Charles Klein, "put on" their own plays. Then there are "General Stage Directors", like William Seymour or J. C. Huffman, employed at so much per annum by big firms like those of Charles Frohman or the Shuberts. There are also detached directors, who contract to stage a play here or there at sums varying from five hundred to a thousand dollars for each piece. Julian Mitchell, R. H. Burnside and George Marion head the list of men who make a specialty of producing musical comedy, which is a field in itself. A broad distinction exists between the stage director and the stage manager, the province of the latter being only to carry out the plans of the former.

A dramatic composition is rehearsed from two to four weeks, the rehearsals usually lasting from ten o'clock in the morning until five in the even-

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ing, with an hour for luncheon. The play being finished and accepted, the manager turns the manuscript over to the stage director. This gentleman reads it carefully, realizing possibilities and devising "business." I have known authors to write, and directors to read, with a miniature stage beside them. On this stage, pins would take the place of people, being moved here and there as one situation followed another. The exact location of the characters at every speech was then marked on the manuscript, so that little or no experimenting was necessary at rehearsal.

After he has read the play, the director consults with the author and the manager and the scene painter. He helps the manager decide what actors had best be engaged, and the four determine every detail of the settings to be built and painted. Miniatures of these settings are afterward prepared by the artist and officially O. K.'d. The manager interviews such people as he thinks he may utilize, and comes to terms with them. Actors are not paid for time spent

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in rehearsal, and, if they prove unsatisfactory before the initial performance, may be dismissed without notice and without recompense.

It is an old custom, now in the way of being revived, to begin operations by reading the play to the company. The first rehearsals may take place in a hall, but, whenever it is possible, a stage is brought into requisition. In the centre of the stage, directly back of the footlights, is the prompt table, at which sit the author, the director, and the stage manager. The players, when they are not at work, lounge in remote corners, leaving the greater portion of the floor space cleared for action. There is no scenery, no furniture, no "properties." Two stools, with a space between them, may stand for Juliet's balcony, for the Rialto Bridge, or merely for a window in a modern apartment house. The casual observer may be puzzled at hearing some Thespian harranguing to four vacant chairs, until it is explained that these four chairs mark the corners of a jury box in which twelve good men and true—same being "supers" yet to be em-

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ployed—are to try the hero for his life.

In the beginning the actors read lines from their parts. A “part” contains the speeches and “business” of the actor for whom it is intended, with “cues”, or the last few words of each speech preceding his, so that he may know when to speak. An extract from the “part” of the Queen in “Hamlet” (Act III; Scene I) would look something like this:

(You enter L. 3. E.)

Did he receive you well?

——— free in his reply.

Did you assay him to any pastime?

——— he suffers for.

I shall obey you. Etc.

The director shows the actor where he shall stand, and where go, at every speech, and the stage manager notes on the manuscript such “business” as is not already written in it. Also, he sets down memoranda for the raising and “dimming” of lights, the ringing of bells, and other things to be done “off stage.”

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After a couple of days' rehearsal the players may be told that they must have the lines of the first act committed to memory within a certain time. "Letter perfect on Thursday!" says the director. "Don't forget; I want to hear every 'if', 'and', and 'but' spoken on Thursday!"

So, act by act, the piece is learned, and, within a week, "parts" are put away, and the real work of rehearsal begins. By this time, the "roughing out" of the production has been done, positions have been taught, and the director begins devoting himself to details. Throughout the first fortnight he interrupts frequently; compels the people to go back a dozen times over this scene or that; halts, thinks out trifles, suggests and experiments. When the rehearsals are two-thirds done, however, he and the author break in less and less often. They sit, notebooks in hand, jotting down their observations, which are read aloud to the company at the end of each act.

Meanwhile, the director has attended to several important matters with which the cast has no immediate concern. He has made out a list of

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"properties", or small articles to be handled in the performance, and has given it to the manager. This list requires care. For example, if matches are needed in the play, it must be ascertained what kind of matches were used at that period, and sulphur, parlor, or "safety" matches must be specified. The manager must also be given lists of furniture and draperies. Later on, a table of "music cues" must be made out for the orchestra, and one of "light cues" for the electrician. The play must be timed, so that it may be known to a minute at what hour the curtain will rise and fall on every act. Generally, a page of typewritten manuscript will occupy a minute, but guess work on this point does not suffice for the director. The players begin to consult him about their costumes, too, and he must take into account the blending of colors, the fashions of the period, and the personal characteristics likely to manifest themselves in attire.

I wish I could make you see a theater during the progress of a rehearsal. The great auditorium is dark and vacant, but for two or three

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cleaners, who may be sweeping and dusting. White cloths cover the seats, and hang over the facades of the boxes. Through the center of the stage, just behind the footlights, a gas pipe rears itself to a height of five or six feet, and a single jet burns at the end of it. Close beside this pipe is the table I have mentioned, where, with their backs to the auditorium, sit three very busy, very attentive gentlemen. Farther on the stage, which is bare except for a couple of tables and a few chairs, stand two or three actors, attired in street dress, talking in a fashion utterly out of keeping with their every-day appearance. And on all sides are little groups of men and women, who pay no attention to the people in the scene and to whom the people in the scene pay no attention, who laugh and chat in subdued tones until some "cue" brings them into the action.

One day a notice appears on the call board. The company will leave from the Grand Central Station the next morning at 7:20 o'clock. The destination may be Syracuse, N. Y. The hotels in that city are so-and-so. The theater is the



"This is the first time the director has seen them 'made up,' and he is likely to have many suggestions"

WHAT HAPPENS AT REHEARSALS

New Wieting. There will be a dress rehearsal there tomorrow night at 8. "Everybody will please be made up half an hour earlier."

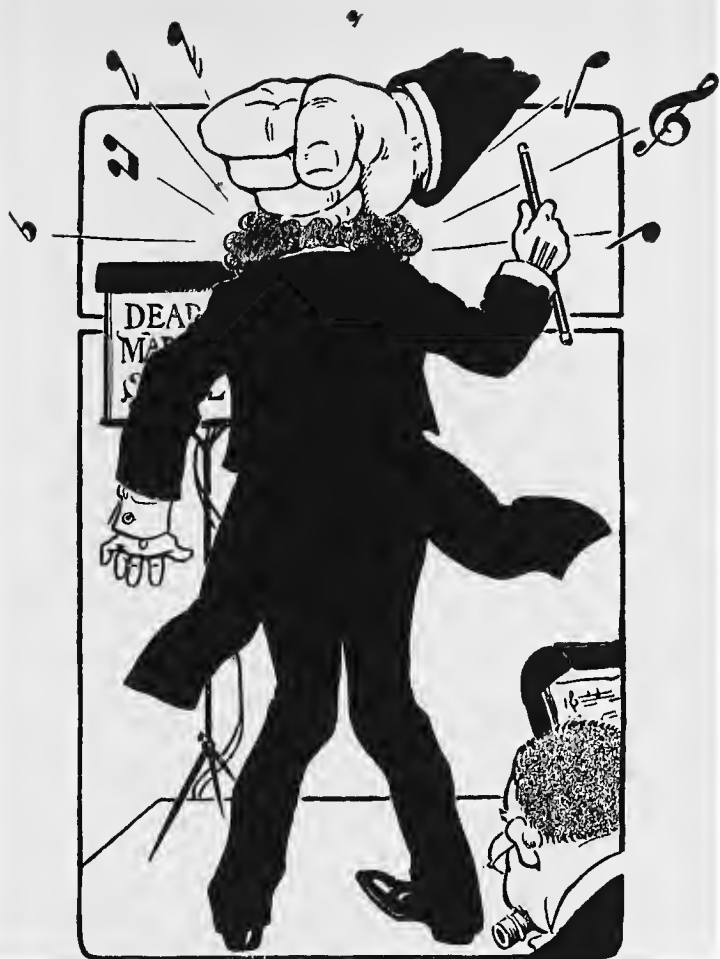
The dress rehearsal is the crowning ordeal in the business of producing plays. It is the summing up of everything that has gone on before; the concentration into one evening of all the work and nervous strain of the past month. It is safe to say that in no other profession is so much labor and agony crowded into a single effort. Very often dress rehearsals last from eight o'clock at night until eight the next morning. Sometimes they last longer. The dress rehearsal of "The Burgomaster", at the Manhattan Theater, New York, began at noon on Sunday and continued, without intermission, until eleven o'clock Monday. Frequently, coffee and sandwiches are served in one of the dressing rooms, or on the stage, and the tired players snatch a bite or two between scenes.

The director has been in the theatre all the afternoon, superintending the setting of scenes and the "dressing" of the stage, which means the

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placing of furniture and the hanging of curtains. Half an hour before the rehearsal begins, the members of the company come from their rooms, one by one, for an inspection of costumes. This is the first time the director has seen them "made up", and he is likely to have many suggestions. This wig isn't gray enough, that beard is too straggling, the dress over there isn't in character. Back go the actors to remedy these defects, and after a time the rehearsal is started.

Dress rehearsals invariably are prefaced by the managerial announcement that there will be no interruptions, but I have never seen an uninterrupted dress rehearsal. The leading man stops in the middle of a love scene to inquire what he shall do with his bouquet, or the leading woman to complain that the property man hasn't placed a bundle of letters where it ought to be. I remember that, when we came to the final rehearsal of "The Little Gray Lady", the manager, Maurice Campbell, finished his remarks about interruptions, and called upon the orchestra to begin the overture. The orchestra promptly struck



"The interruption came on the spot"

WHAT HAPPENS AT REHEARSALS

up "The Dead March from Saul", and the forbidden interruption came on the spot.

A dress rehearsal is supposed to be an ordinary performance without an audience. But it isn't. There is no excitement, no enthusiasm, no inspiration. Speeches fall flat, dialogue seems inordinately long and wearisome, bits of "business" that have appeared all right before look wholly different in changed surroundings. The actors, finding themselves for the first time in the setting to be used, are utterly lost. By-play with small articles, rehearsed twenty times, is blundered over when the player finds the "prop" actually in his hands. To observe the most experienced actor, and man of the world, handle a tea cup or a card case at a dress rehearsal you would swear that he had never seen such a thing before in his life.

And, O, the wickedness of inanimate things—doors that will not shut, matches that cannot be lit, table drawers that positively refuse to open! Whenever something of this sort goes wrong, the carpenter or the property man has to be called

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upon, and the scene stops, to be resumed later with a flatness commensurate with the length of the halt. Above all other sounds rings the clarion voice of the director, shouting to electricians, stage hands, actors. Everybody makes notes, to be quietly gone over with the company on the morrow, just before the actual performance.

At last, when the gray dawn is peeping in at the windows, when everyone concerned has reached the ultimate stage of exhaustion, the rehearsal is dismissed. The director makes a few remarks—sufficient censure to prevent over-confidence, mixed with enough hope to give courage. "Pretty bad", he says, "but I look for you to pull up tonight. We'll get together for a little chat at four o'clock in the smoking room of the theater."

Thus ends the period of rehearsal—a period of hard work, trials, tribulations, constant nervous strain. And it may all go for nothing. In three short hours the labor of years on the part of the author, of months on the part of the manager, of weeks on the part of the players, may be



*"Matches that cannot
be lit"*

WHAT HAPPENS AT REHEARSALS

proved utterly worthless and without result. This, however, depends upon the public; those concerned have done all they know, all that can be done, not by random and haphazard work; but by skillful following of what is at once an exact science and a variable art. The philosophic author shrugs his shoulders as he leaves the theater.

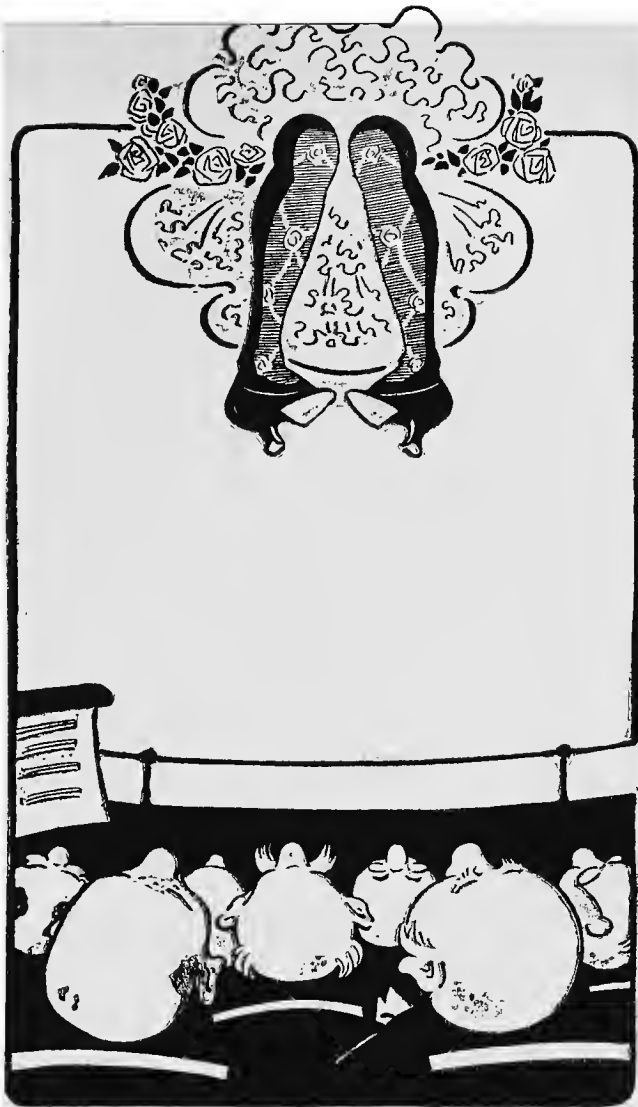
“Well?” inquires the stage director.

“Well”, he replies. “We’ve done our best. It’s on the knees of the gods.”

THE ART OF "GETTING IT OVER"

Being the sort of title to suggest a treatise on suicide, whereas, in point of fact, this chapter merely confides all the author does not know about acting.

EVEN in a dictionary of slang, inquisitive reader, you will not find the phrase, "getting it over." "Art has its own language," and the language of dramatic art sometimes is fearful and wonderful to contemplate. In this particular idiom, "it" stands for an impression or expression, and the precise boundary that the impression or expression "gets over" is the footlights. Do I make myself clear? As to the art of "getting it over," that is a thing about which no two people are likely to agree. When, on the first night of F. Ziegfeld's "Follies of 1910," a lady named Lillian Lorraine, ensconced in a swing and two gorgeous silk stockings, was projected into the tobacco smoke above the third row of orchestra seats, a great many star-gazers united in the



"A lady, ensconced in a swing and two gorgeous silk stockings, was projected above the third row of orchestra seats"

THE ART OF "GETTING IT OVER"

idea that her manager had solved the problem.

Paul Potter's comedy, "The Honor of the Family," was a melancholy failure at 8.40 o'clock on the evening of its premiere in the Hudson Theater. At 8.42 Otis Skinner, in the character of Colonel Philippe Bridau, his aggressive high hat tilted at an insolent angle, his arrogant cane poking defiance, had walked past a window in the flat, and the piece was a success. Without speaking a word, without doing the least thing pertinent to the play, Mr. Skinner had reached out into the auditorium and gripped the interest of sixteen hundred bored spectators. This is so fine a demonstration of the thesis that my article really should be advertised as "with an illustration by Otis Skinner."

"In that instant," the rescuer said afterward, "I knew I had them." Any actor would have known. "Getting it over," vague as the phrase may be to a layman, is almost a physical experience to the man or woman who accomplishes it. The thought sent out seems as

THE FOOTLIGHTS—FORE AND AFT

material a thing as a handball, "and," once remarked Richard Mansfield, "I can see it go smashing past the footlights and into the brains of my auditors, or striking an invisible wall across the proscenium arch and bouncing back to the stage."

The ability to send the thought smashing is surprisingly separate from the art of acting. Many schooled and skilled performers, whose names are omitted from this chronicle because I don't want to swell the waiting list of my enemies, have never got into an auditorium without coming through the door back of the boxes. Knowledge may be power, but it isn't propulsion. Nothing is more brainless than a mustard plaster, yet it draws. George W. Lewes wrote several illuminative works on histrionism, and we have the word of A. B. Walkley that his Shylock made tender-hearted persons glad that Shakespeare died in the seventeenth century.

On the other hand, there are mediocre mimes who possess the faculty of establishing immedi-



*"The thought sent out seems as material
a thing as a handball. Sometimes, I can
see it striking an invisible wall and
bouncing back to the stage"*

THE ART OF "GETTING IT OVER"

ate communication with an audience. All of us have applauded the chorus girl who, while endeavoring conscientiously to put her best foot forward at the exact moment and in the precise manner that thirty other best feet advanced, has scored a distinct individual success. A young woman did that on the first night of Peter Dailey's "The Press Agent" at the Hackett. She was fined \$5 for it, but another chorister, whose name is Elsie Ferguson and who attracted attention in "The Girl From Kay's," is starring this year under direction of Henry B. Harris.

Call it art, truth, intelligence, personality, magnetism, telepathy, hypnotism—Edwin Stevens, in a recent interview, called it hypnotism—or the *wanderlust* of a personally-conducted aura, the fact remains that there is a something by which some actors, without visible effort, convey a distinct and emphatic impression. We have seen John Drew step upon the stage, and, even while the applause lingered over his entrance, shed a sense of elegance, manner and

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mastery. We have responded to the charm of John Barrymore and A. E. Matthews before they opened their mouths to speak. We have absorbed the radiance of May Irwin's good humor, we have felt unbidden the piquancy of Marie Tempest, we have laughed at a look from Bert Williams, and we have been awed when William Gillette, walking on as though there was nothing in the wind, has portentously and with sinister purpose flicked the ashes from the tip of his cigar.

No, friends and fellow dramatic critics, this is not acting. The art and experience of acting may go into it, but acting can not be held to account for what happens before a man begins to act. The curtain rising on the second act of "Such a Little Queen" discloses two girls, a telephone operator and a stenographer, chatting obliviously while a clerk, at the other end of the office, robs the mail. It is important that the robbery should register, else much that follows can not be understood. For a long time, when we were rehearsing, it seemed impossible



*"William Gillette portentously
flicked the ashes from his cigar"*

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to get this theft over the footlights. The girls were pretty, their dialogue was breezy, and, for catching the mind, a word in the mouth is worth two conveyed by pantomime. Our clerk, a capable enough young fellow, simply could not get the attention of the audience. After he had failed to do so at several trial performances, Frank Keenan, who was staging the play, mounted the rostrum and took his place. Mr. Keenan did exactly what had been done by his predecessor. His movements, like the other man's, were according to the book; his facial expression was the same, and, of course, he did not speak. But he held us—Heavens, how he held us! Every eye was on him the instant the curtain lifted, and, for all the notice they got, the girls might as well have been painted on the proscenium arch. Even after that, the original couldn't do it. While he was robbing the mails, we had to rob the females of every distracting line of dialogue. Wherever Frank Keenan sits is the center of the stage.

If you ask me—and we'll assume that you

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have asked me—what is responsible for this sort of an achievement, I shall answer “self.” I don’t mean personality. I mean that, whether he wishes it or not, what “gets over” isn’t so often what a man thinks or desires, but what he *is*. The same thing is true of painters and sculptors and novelists—“For,” said Walter Bagehot, “we know that authors don’t keep tame steam engines to write their books”—and how much more likely is it to be true of the artist who is himself the expression of his art. In the footlight trough of a burlesque theater in the Bowery, invisible to the audience but staring the performers in the face, is the legend: “Smile, ladies, smile!” Yet these ladies, thus perpetually reminded, never spread the contagion of merriment and good humor for which a Puritan community would have quarantined Blanche Ring. Don’t tell me Miss Ring is an artist. She isn’t, but she’s jolly!

The board of governors, or the house committee, or whatever it is that directs the destinies of the Passion Play at Ober-Ammergau

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isn't far wrong, if, as is reported, it insists upon purity in its Madonna and beneficence in its Man of Sorrows. Imagine a woman of notoriously evil life, or even of evil life that wasn't notorious, impersonating Sister Beatrice in the marvelous miracle play of Maeterlinck's. A gentleman who had driven four wives—tandem—to death or the divorce court would have been an offense as Manson in "The Servant in the House." Mr. Forbes-Robertson is an admirable artist, but it was his spirituality, his asceticism that "got over" in his delightful portrayal of The Third Floor Back. Certainly, it isn't the frankness of lines, verbal or anatomical, that makes the difference between a musical comedy and a salacious "girl show." It's the intention; the character of producer and produced.

"Robert Loraine isn't a good actor," William A. Brady said to me once, "but he's sure to be a popular star, because of the vigor, the virility, the fresh young manhood, the breath of outdoors that he sends over the footlights." Con-

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sider the lilies in the cheeks of Billie Burke, and then, if you can tear yourself away from that floricultural exhibition, consider the box-office value of the youth that spills itself from the lips of Wallace Eddinger and Douglas Fairbanks. All the genius of Mrs. Fiske couldn't make an audience believe in her motherhood in "The Unwelcome Mrs. Hatch"—"I wouldn't trust her with a baby of mine," whispered a woman in the first-night audience at the Manhattan—but how we felt the maternalism of Jennie Eustace in "The Witching Hour," and, in another way, of Jessie Millward in "The Hypocrites." Hedwig Reicher is a capital actress, but she is also a self-reliant woman, and her skill couldn't win sympathy for her supposed helplessness in "The Next of Kin."

Two years ago I was trying terribly to make prospective audiences sense the pitiful plight of poor little Anna Victoria in "Such a Little Queen." I wrote a dozen lines as to the discomfort of starvation, the inconvenience of being put into the street. They were things that

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thought, and then I remembered that, when I came to New York with nothing but my "cheek" a woman might say under the circumstances, I and two dollars in money, I used to look out of the windows—the window—of my top-story room and think: "In all this great city there isn't a human being who cares whether I live or die." These very words I put into the mouth of Anna Victoria, and, of all my fine speeches, that was the only one that really "got over."

It "got over" because it was true, and because, whatever else truth may be—has any one ever satisfactorily answered Pontius Pilate?—it is the best bullet one can shoot across the foot-lights. Vicarious experience sometimes does the trick, but only for persons of highly developed mimetic faculty. I remember a woman in a play who was supposed to receive her death blow with an "Oh, my God!" She was particularly requested not to scream it, or to groan it, or to do anything else conventional with it. It was to be a helpless "Oh, my God!", a hopeless "Oh, my God!", an "Oh, my God!" that

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sounded like the thud of a hammer at the heart. One night she got the tone. "How?" we asked. "I heard a woman say it in the street. An ambulance surgeon had told her her baby was dead."

The first principle of "getting it over," then, is being, feeling, believing. It is a principle that draws interest. Believing is very important. Do you think John Mason could have held his audience through the episode under the electrolier in "The Witching Hour" if he hadn't believed in it? I don't. Perriton Carlyle, in "The Little Gray Lady," made a mistake. It was a bad mistake, composed chiefly of a hundred dollars that didn't belong to him. I never knew any one in my life who hadn't stolen something sometime, and many of my friends are pretty respectable now. I believed that Carlyle's foot had slipped, and that, in spite of the accident, he might walk straight the rest of his days. I couldn't get an actor to believe it. Edgar Selwyn didn't, and Eugene Ormonde didn't, and, while they played the part, nobody did.

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John Albaugh, Jr., an actor inferior to both of them, felt sure of the inherent goodness of Carlyle, and so made possible the success of a piece that could not have succeeded without universal sympathy for its hero.

Well, we've ridden a long way astride of a hobby. Let's get back, and admit that we like sugar on our strawberries, which is to say art with our nature. For, after all, a generous admixture of skill is required in the expression of instinct, just as the peach-bloomiest complexion, displayed in the high light of the theater, must have rouge upon it to seem what it really is. Every stage manager knows the genuine society girl who is engaged to lend verisimilitude to a drawing-room drama, and who, at rehearsals, regards her teacup as though it were some strange and savage animal.

Edwin Booth's Othello was the triumph of an artist. He made audiences forget that his embodiment of the Moor was a thin-chested, undersized student of sensitive face and dreamy eyes. Charles Kean's first appearance in Lon-

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don was as Macbeth, and his Lady Macbeth, a great woman in both senses of the word, refused to play opposite a leading man who "looked like a half-grown boy." Afterwards, she swore that he grew during the performance. Salvini drawing tears from an audience ignorant of his tongue by counting from one to an hundred; Bernhardt scolding an actor in the death tones of Camille; Margaret Anglin repeating "Poor little ice-cream soda" until her hearers broke down sobbing—these are examples of pure artistry, of "getting over" impressions without even a thought behind them. No one who knows the first thing about the theater can underrate, be it never so slightly, the value of training, of experience; the effectiveness of carefully-thought-out "business", of inflection, of nuance, of pitch, of rhythm, of all the things that require years of study, labor, and perseverance.

Tully Marshall, whose Hannock in "The City" was the finest, and seemed the most inspired, acting of last season, tells me that he



*"Lady Macbeth swore that
he grew during the performance"*

THE ART OF "GETTING IT OVER"

worked out, almost mechanically, every thrill in his big scene at the end of Act III. Mr. Marshall made so convincing the degeneracy, the besottedness of the character that I have heard laymen insist he must be a drug fiend. Yet this actor knows exactly how he produced his effects. Ethel Barrymore, on the other hand, knew only that she had striven for years, and had never quite felt herself "go smashing past the footlights and into the brains of her auditors."

Then, on the first night in New York of John Galsworthy's "The Silver Box," when, as Mrs. Jones, charwoman, she stepped down from the witness stand, silent, but thinking with all the force that was in her of the wretched, squalid home to which she was returning alone, and the curtain fell between her and the vast stillness of the awed audience, she knew that at last she had "got it over."

"And, oh!" says Ethel Barrymore, "I found the knowledge sweet."

SOMETHING ABOUT "FIRST NIGHTS"

Wherein is shown that the opening of a new play is more hazardous than the opening of a jackpot, and that theatrical production is a game of chance in comparison with which roulette and rouge-et-noir are as tiddledewinks or old maid.

WHILE the curtain was rising and falling after the third act of "Seven Days", then being given its initial performance in New York at the Astor Theater, a woman behind me remarked: "I'll bet Hopwood is the happiest man in town at this moment!"

The person to whom she alluded was Avery Hopwood, collaborative author of the play in question, and almost any auditor in the house would have declined to take the other side of the wager. "Seven Days" was an obvious success, an unexpected success, and a success that had arrived something after schedule time. Mr. Hopwood had shared with your humble servant the credit for his first work, "Clothes", and his

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second and third works, "The Powers That Be" and "This Woman and This Man", had not called the fire department to the Hudson River. Those watchful gentlemen, the managers, who measure a dramatist by the line in front of his box office, were beginning to wonder whether "Hopwood really can write a play." Here was a vociferous answer to the question—an answer destined to be repeated, with greater emphasis, a year later in "Nobody's Widow." "Certainly", I thought, "Hopwood is the happiest man in town at this moment!"

Subsequently, on my way out of the Astor, I came within an ace of running into "the happiest man." He was standing on the curb, half a block north of the theater, and he didn't "look the part" with which he had been invested. His face was white and set, his brow puckered into deep wrinkles, and his chief occupation seemed to be the nice one of nibbling the skin from his knuckles without actually lacerating them. "Well", he inquired, with agonized anxiety, "how did it go?"

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"A knockout!" I replied, in the vernacular.

"On the level?" he asked. "You're not trying to jolly me?"

There was no suggestion of insincerity in the query. It was evident that Diogenes, if he had returned to look for the happiest, instead of for an honest man, must needs have gone farther than the author of "Seven Days."

From contact with other victims and from personal experience, I feel qualified to say that the most terrible ordeal known since the days of the inquisition is a theatrical "first night." Dramatist, manager, actors and even stage hands are tortured by it, and their sufferings are not to be gauged by the number of times they have undergone the horror. The "first night", moreover, is a thing unique in art. A painting may hang for weeks before the painter learns whether he has succeeded or not; a book may be on the market nearly a year without its author knowing the result of his effort. In either case, criticisms are many and varying. The verdict on a play, however, is given with the suddenness and force

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of a blow, and sometimes it is equally conclusive. Failure in any other field leaves something in the way of assets; theatrical failure sweeps away everything. Realize this, put yourself in the place of those most concerned, and you will understand the effect of a "first night." Suppose that all your possessions, representing the labor of a life-time, were tied together and suspended by a string over a bottomless abyss. The feeling with which you would watch that string as it stretched to the breaking point would be akin to the feeling with which the dramatist watches the audience come to pass judgment on his work.

Of course, it is not always, or often, true that a single production either makes or breaks those concerned in it, but even a single production is so large an element in this making or breaking that it becomes of vital importance. Sometimes, too, "first night" gatherings are wrong, and performances which they condemn afterward prove great artistic and financial hits. This, however, is rare; the say of the initial audience, made up of professional reviewers and experienced thea-

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ter-goers, is likely to be conclusive. Henrietta Crosman, then an unknown actress from the West, came to New York with "Mistress Nell" on October 9, 1900, and opened to receipts under two hundred dollars. A single day later the sums being paid into the box office were limited only by the seating capacity of the house. Helen Ware, after years of unrecognized good work in small parts, achieved stellar honors within the three hours of her first metropolitan appearance as Annie Jeffries in "The Third Degree." No chronicle short of a six-volume book could begin to give an account of the playwrights and players whose stock has soared a hundred points during the course of a single evening on Broadway.

Failures determined with equal promptitude have been so numerous during the past few seasons that it seems idle to recapitulate. One night proved a sufficiently long time in which to guess accurately at the future of "Septimus", "Drifting", "A Skylark", "Mr. Buttles", "Miss Patsy", "The Heights", "The Upstart", "The Scan-



*"A playwright whose stock
has soared a hundred points
in a single evening"*

SOMETHING ABOUT FIRST NIGHTS

dal", "The Young Turk", "The Foolish Virgin", "The Next of Kin", "The Fires of Fate", "Children of Destiny", "Welcome to Our City", and "A Little Brother of the Rich." Two or three of these had been great triumphs in London and Paris, half a dozen were by famous Englishmen and Americans, nearly all represented extravagant expenditure on the part of experienced managers, but neither precedent nor prominence disturbed the "first night" jury in New York. Augustus Thomas' "The Ranger" was voted impossible a few years ago at Wallack's with as little hesitation as though it had been written by John Jones instead of by the author of "Arizona." Frank McKee cancelled the bookings of Hoyt's "A Dog in the Manger" while the second act was in progress at Washington, and "The Narrow Path", offered for a run at the Hackett, never had another performance there—or anywhere else.

With such possibilities as these before his eyes, with "Mrs. Dane's Defence" at one end of the pendulum's reach and "The Evangelist" at

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the other, do you wonder that the playwright is nervous on a "first night?"

Unfortunately, it is not alone the behavior of the "death watch" in front of the footlights that gives cause for anxiety. Actors and actresses are uncertain creatures, while inanimate objects seem to have a perfect genius for going wrong at critical times. No amount of rehearsing can be depended upon to prevent a moon wobbling as it rises at an initial performance, or to make the crash of thunder sound unlike Bridget taking it out of the pots and pans after dinner. A laugh at a serious moment may decide the fate of a play, the fate of a play may make a difference of several hundred thousand dollars to its manager, and, this being true, what the manager says to the property man or the electrician after a *faux pas* like either of those mentioned is a problem you can solve in half the time you once devoted to discovering the age of Ann.

I remember vividly the primal performance at Hartford of Paul Arthur's melodrama, "Lost

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River." One of the mechanical effects in this piece was a bicycle race, during which the contestants pedaled wildly on stationery machines. The effect of passing landscape was given by a panorama and a fence that moved rapidly in the opposite direction. At least, they were supposed to move in the opposite direction, but on the occasion of which I speak they didn't. The race became one between the bicyclists and the surrounding country, and the surrounding country was far in the lead when an irate stage manager rang down the curtain. This accident never happened again, but, had the "first night" been in New York instead of on the road, once would have been enough.

The late A. M. Palmer used to tell a story illustrative of the fact that players, under stress of "first night" excitement, often share "the wickedness of inanimate things." Mr. Palmer produced "Trilby" when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb, and upon the consequences of the performance depended his immediate future. Paul Potter's dramatization opened in

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Boston, and gave no cause for worry except in the matter of its extreme length. Half the population of Boston is also the population of suburban towns, and Sarah Bernhardt, George Cohan and a Yale lock couldn't keep 'em from leaving a theater at train time. Consequently, when eleven o'clock came and the last act of "Trilby" had just begun, a frown settled on the classic brow of the ordinarily imperturbable Mr. Palmer.

Virginia Harned, neither as experienced nor as clever then as now, was playing Trilby, and she felt that her portrayal had been more or less overshadowed by the Svengali of Wilton Lackaye. There is no better part in the drama than that of the hypnotist, while the opportunities of the name role are limited. Miss Harned's first chance to make her talent conspicuous came with the death of the model in the last act. "Trilby began to die at 11:10", declared Mr. Palmer. "The audience had already commenced looking at its watches, and a photograph of my thoughts would have developed into a blue print. Miss



*"Sarah Bernhardt, George Cohan, and
a Yale lock couldn't keep a Boston
audience from leaving at train time"*

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Harned, on the contrary, approached the scene with joy, too wrought up to take into consideration the fact that the people in front had begun to be more interested in Newton than in the affairs of Little Billee. Trilby died in every way known to medical science and the art of acting. She died of heart disease and consumption and cerebral spinal meningitis. She died a la Bernhardt and Marlowe and Clara Morris. She died on the sofa and the piano stool and two of the rugs, and, just when I thought she had breathed her last against the door R. I. E., she found strength to take a few steps and do it all over again in the center of the stage. Little Billee was waiting in the wings, but, as you will understand if you remember the play, no one could come on until Trilby had shuffled off her mortal coil. And Trilby, on this occasion, simply would not shuffle. It was nearly 11:30 when she finally gave up the ghost on a davenport L. C., in the presence of that portion of the audience sufficiently Yankee to be determined upon missing nothing it had paid to see. That death scene,

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abridged and expurgated, afterward became a most powerful and effective bit of acting, but I confess that on the evening in question the quality of it was somewhat obscured by the quantity."

Dramatic authors, likely to be the victims of incidents of this sort, cannot be blamed for manifesting marked peculiarities as regards "first nights." When my best and least successful play, "The Secret Orchard", was given its premiere at the Lyric, I trotted off to see "A Knight for a Day" at Wallack's. James Forbes spends his evening behind the scenes. After the opening of "The Commuters", which ran six months at the Criterion, he locked himself in a dressing room, convinced that the piece was a dismal failure, and refused to come out, even when implored to do so in order that the leading woman might get into her street clothes. Throughout the performance of his maiden effort, "Her Husband's Wife", "Al" Thomas walked up and down the block in front of the Garrick. Few men are able even to assume the insouciance of Harry B. Smith, who, at the primal presentation



*"Trilby died in every way known to
medical science and the art of acting"*

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of his "The Bachelor Belles", smoked a cigar in the lobby throughout the first act and went home in the middle of the second.

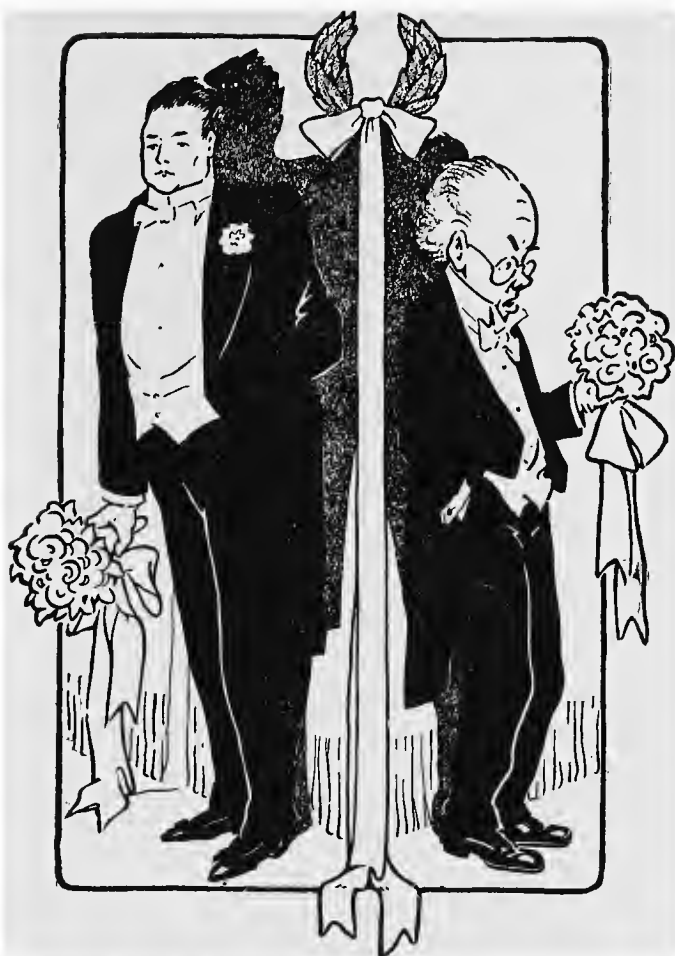
Until constant ridicule broke up the practice, most authors needed little urging to induce them to address their audiences on "first nights." As recently as the fall of 1909, during the performance of "On the Eve", Martha Morton, its adapter, made a speech from her box at the Hudson. The man behind the pen has so little chance to get into the limelight—poor fellow!—that to speak or not to speak will always be a mooted question with him. Either course is likely to be mistaken by the critics, who put down the unfortunate scribe as a vainglorious person if he appears and as a poseur if he does not. Personally, I feel that the average author is much more favorably represented by what he writes than by what he says, and that neither he nor the player has any real justification for mixing his own personality with those of the puppets he creates. It is disillusioning, after having spent some time in witnessing stirring deeds and

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hearing high-sounding words, to be confronted with a little, stoop-shouldered man, his face white in the glare of the footlights and his hands anxiously seeking a refuge in his ill-fitting and pocketless dress trousers, and to realize that this grotesque figure is that of the inventor of all the splendid beings you have seen.

New York audiences are almost the only ones in the country that ever manifest any particular desire to gaze upon the dramatist. I heard a man cry "Author!" once at a "first night" in Chicago, and the ushers were about to eject him when the manager explained to them that the enthusiast was acting with perfect propriety.

I have told you, in another part of this book, of the oratorical talent of Augustus Thomas, who is the most impressive of before-the-curtain monologists. He makes a fine appearance on the stage, self-possessed and well-dressed, and his little talks invariably are brief and witty and well-rounded. So, too, are those of Eugene Presbrey. Paul Armstrong's undiplomatic words have been known to prove a "last straw" on the



*"The author—as you imagine him,
and as he proves to be"*

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graves of his failures, and Edith Wharton and Charlotte Thompson, clever women both but not prepossessing, almost turned into burlesque the "first night" of "The Awakening of Helena Richie." Charles Klein is not big enough physically to fill the eye, and David Belasco, with his trick of being pushed violently to the front and of fingering his forelock, creates an impression of insincerity and preparedness. William Gillette has all an actor's skill in appealing to an audience, and, I am told, saved the day—or, rather, the night—for his "Sherlock Holmes" in London. George Ade and Sydney Rosenfeld are amusing on "the apron", but other brilliant men, like Edwin Milton Royle and Richard Harding Davis, are not at their best when obliged to say "thank you." Mr. Davis figured in a neat bit of good humor in New Haven, where, after the third act of Mr. Thomas' adaptation of his "Soldiers of Fortune", Mr. Thomas assumed his identity and he pretended to be Mr. Thomas.

English playwrights are much more at ease

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than are American. Henry Arthur Jones, A. W. Pinero, Henry V. Esmond, and even young Hubert Henry Davies look well and talk well when they have occasion to "speak out in meeting." George Bernard Shaw's witticism when somebody in the gallery hissed while he was making a curtain speech has become famous. The Irish Voltaire had just referred to the play of the evening, the third act of which had been concluded, when this sound of disapprobation cleft the circumambient atmosphere. "Ah!" said Mr. Shaw to the disturber, "you and I are quite agreed, but we seem in the minority."

I cannot pass by the subject of "first night" addresses without relating to what extent Washington is indebted to me for a chatty five minutes with Mr. Thomas on the occasion of the production of "The Hoosier Doctor." At that time, I was dramatic critic of The Washington Post. I was riding horseback, and, at five in the afternoon, found myself six or eight miles from town, and in the presence of Mr. Thomas. He had been bicycling and his machine had broken down.

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"Lend me your horse, like a good fellow", he begged, when we came together. "I want to get back for the performance of 'The Hoosier Doctor.' "

"Can't!" I replied. "I've got to write a review of that same play."

"Well", returned the author, smiling in the midst of his perplexity, "my claim is the stronger. 'The Hoosier Doctor' can be performed whether your criticism is written or not, but your criticism cannot be written unless 'The Hoosier Doctor' is performed."

In the end, the public was obliged to forego neither play nor review, since Mr. Thomas galloped to the city on my horse and I was picked up soon after by a farmer in a wagon.

A list of the "first nights" that have gone down into histrionic history would vie in length with a record of the bits of the true cross on view in Europe. Primarily, one would be obliged to record premieres at which riots have occurred, and since, at one time a century ago, it was easier to hold an Irish election without

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a fight than to give an initial dramatic performance without one, this would take much space and research. The initial representations of great works, such as those of Shakespeare and Moliere, and the professional debuts of celebrated actors, like Thomas Betterton and Peg Woffington, would baffle the descriptive powers of so humble a chronicler as myself. Assuredly, a whole book might be written about the reception originally accorded "Hamlet," and I am certain that we should all like to know precisely what happened at the Boston Theater on the evening of Monday, September 10, 1849, when Edwin Booth made his first bow to the public. Nearly everyone remembers the interesting story of the "first night" of "A Parisian Romance" at the Union Square Theater on January 10, 1883, when an obscure young man named Richard Mansfield made the minor role of Baron Cheyrial the biggest part in the play and himself the most-talked-of actor in America.

My own most notable "first night" was at

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Rome, some time in May, 1890, when, as a youngster, I heard "*Cavalleria Rusticana*" sung for the first time on any stage. My recollection of the event is not vivid, but I recall that the composer, Pietro Mascagni, wept, and that the audience joined him, having already done every other emotional thing you could call to mind. This sort of enthusiasm is not exceptional among the Latins, and "first nights" in Madrid, Naples, Brussels and Paris always are likely to be extremely spectacular. Berlin, Vienna and Prague are less excitable, though I witnessed rather a remarkable demonstration at a performance of an opera called "*Die Hexe*" in the metropolis last mentioned, and saw a crowd draw home Charlotte Wolter's carriage one evening in Vienna.

The stalls in a London playhouse hold men and women as reserved and conservative as any in the world, but the pit, which signifies approval by the conventional applause, has made its disapprobation dreaded at premieres. The "boo!" of the Cockney who has paid "two and

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six" for his place and is resolved upon getting his money's worth or knowing the reason why is a potent damper. Disorder in the pit may not even have been caused by the poorness of a production; persistent enthusiasm on the part of a clique or the appearance of a foreign star often provoke it. I shall never forget how near several patriotic Americans, myself among them, were to provoking a riot against Nat Goodwin at the opening of "The Cowboy and the Lady" in the Duke of York's Theater.

New York, which never commits itself with a "Boo!" or a "Bis!", which never hisses and somewhat rarely applauds, provides the most terrible ordeal in the world for author, actor and manager. The "first nighter" is as much a type here as in London. A small percentage of him are the tired and idle rich, the majority being made up of wine agents, book-makers, professional "dead-heads", ladies of uneasy virtue, and dramatic critics. Of an opening audience at Weber & Fields' it was said once that "there wasn't a woman in the

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house who hadn't changed her hair and her husband within the year."

These boulevardiers have seen everything produced in town during a decade, or perhaps two decades, and are absolutely pleasure-proof. Their attitude expresses the defiance: "I *dare* you to satisfy me." One of their number, asked as to the fate of a comedy, is reported to have replied: "I'm afraid it's a success." If it were only that these people knew everything, and were hard to please, nobody would have the right to object to them. The trouble is that they are pleased with the wrong fare. Witty lines and subtle construction, delicate sentiment and simple sincerity, except for their appeal to the reviewers, must wait for recognition until the second night. Legs and lingerie, *double entendre* and bald suggestion, the wit of the slap stick and the melody of the street piano are the chosen diet of this "death watch", which "sits in solemn silence", with impassive faces and row after row of masculine shirt bosoms rearing themselves in the darkness like

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tombstones in a pauper graveyard.

How to avoid this chilling influence is a puzzle that has agitated every producer on Broadway. Your New York manager has a list of the seats regularly occupied by the critics, and these go out first. Then the wine agents and book-makers aforesaid buy the tickets laid aside for them. Next the general public has an opportunity, of which it is slow to take advantage, and then whatever has been left is given away. Nobody ever saw a small "first night" audience in Manhattan, nor one in which there were not at least three hundred enthusiastic persons. This enthusiasm deceives no one—least of all the newspaper men for whom is it intended—and it rebounds like a ball against the hardness of the general imperturbability. Many a time, while the gallant three hundred were splitting their gloves and callousing their hands, I have seen traveling from critic to critic that glance of understanding and disapproval which has sealed the fate of so many thousand plays.

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The New York critics are about a score in number, and, during the past few years, there have been many changes in the corps. Its dean, William Winter, resigned from *The Tribune*, where his post is filled by Arthur Warren. Alan Dale, of *The American*, continues to be the most widely known of our writers on theatrical topics, and we still have with us, as stand-bys, Adolph Klauber, of *The Times*; Louis De Foe, of *The World*; Rennold Wolf, of *The Telegraph*; Acton Davies, of *The Evening Sun*; Charles Darnton, of *The Evening World*; Rankin Towse, of *The Post*, and Robert Gilbert Welsh, of *The Evening Telegram*. The Press has been carrying on a lively theatrical war, and, perhaps for that reason, its reviews manifest not only ignorance but the most bump-tious disregard of general and expert opinion. Arthur Brisbane having declared against "abuse", *The Evening Journal* finds good in everything; *The Sun* has had no regular critic since it lost Walter Prichard Eaton, and *The Herald* boasts that it prints only "reports" of

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performances. "First nights" are arranged, when that is possible, on different evenings, so that all the critics may be present at each, but, when there is a conflict, every man picks out the opening he considers most important and either lets the others go until later in the week or sends his assistant.

There are thirty or forty reviewers who represent magazines and periodicals, but, for the most part, these are *de classe*. They flock alone in the lobbies during intermissions, when the men from the daily newspapers congregate in groups to exchange a word or two about the play and to discuss other matters of common interest. These foyer gatherings pronounce a verdict that, as we have seen, is seldom—perhaps too seldom—overruled. Many a manager has leaned against his box office after the third act of a new piece, eavesdropping to learn what intelligence, experience, keen judgment and careful reading and rehearsing have not told him.

For there are two "anxious seats" on a "first

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night" in New York: One in the author's box
and one in the manager's.

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Being inside information regarding a kind of entertainment at which one requires intelligence no more than the kitchen range.

VARIETY is the spice of life. So is vaudeville. If you doubt it, consider Gertrude Hoffmann, Valeska Suratt, Eva Tanguay, and other beauties unadorned of "the two a day."

Time was when "continuous performances" offered the best means of convincing Aunt Jane that there were harmless theatrical entertainments besides "The Old Homestead." Variety, of course, had been a word to excite horror. But vaudeville—well, vaudeville was to variety what "darn" is to "damn!"

And, as the advertisements have it, there was a reason. B. F. Keith, when he took the curse off a type of amusement generally associated with dance halls, "stag" houses, minstrel shows and "The Black Crook", had his eye on Aunt

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Jane. Vaudeville, born in France during the Fifteenth Century, and named after Les Vaux de Vire, the home of its father, Oliver Basselin, stood for something just a little more ribald than variety. Mr. Keith resolved to stand for nothing of the kind. Beginning in Boston, he soon invaded Philadelphia and New York with shows so religiously expurgated that they couldn't have drawn the slightest protest from a Presbyterian Synod.

Oaths might not be spoken at Keith's. Be-tighted damsels were banned and barred—for-bidden fair. Short skirts were permitted under certain rigorous restrictions. One of the restrictions was that ladies who wore short skirts must not wear silk stockings. I remember wondering wherein the silk worm was more immoral than the cotton-gin, and concluding that, despite the phrase "ugly as sin", Mr. Keith had defined sin as anything attractive.

Virtue and vaudeville were synonymous for something over a decade. I don't know precisely when people stopped going to hear the new

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ditties, and began going to see the nudities. "Living pictures" began it. "Living pictures", you may recollect, were ladies in pink union suits. They were supposed to be popular because of artistic draping and grouping, but the minimum of drapery always brought about the maximum of popularity. It was but a step from union suits to non-union suits; from fleshings to whitewash and bronze varnish. In 1906 London went quite mad over a Venus whose entire wardrobe was applied with a paintbrush. Eventually Venus rose from the sea in America, but, by the date of her arrival, our own performers had so far outstripped her that she didn't create even a mild sensation.

Koster & Bial's had paved the way with Charmion, who disrobed while seated upon a flying trapeze. Oscar Hammerstein had done some astonishing things at his Victoria Theater. Salome, driven out of the Metropolitan Opera House, had taken refuge in vaudeville, garbed—if one may use the word in connection with a costume somewhat less extensive than a porus



*"Venus rose from the sea",
(With apologies to Botticelli)*

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plaster—in a fashion that made it easy to understand why John the Baptist lost his head. Maud Allen, in England, and Ruth St. Denis, in the United States, were reconciling the authorities to the nude in art, and making possible any sort of display that had dancing or diving as an excuse. Annette Kellarman, attired in a bathing suit that clung to her like a poor relation, awakened wonderful interest in aquatic sports, while Lala Selbini showed herself to be of the opinion that clothing was inconsistent with good juggling, and a female person whose name escapes me demonstrated that bare legs were a great help in playing the violin.

The Princess Rajah, an "Oriental" dancer who had attracted attention at Huber's Museum, journeyed to Broadway, where an excuse for her undress, and her wriggings, was found in the faint pretence that she impersonated Cleopatra. "Placing a snake in her bosom", read a note on the program, "she danced before a statue of Antony until it bit her." Remarkable as this behavior may seem on the part of a Ro-

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man General, it was not wholly incomprehensible to theatre-goers who witnessed the antics of Cleopatra. According to Rajah, the Queen of Egypt demonstrated her sorrow chiefly by seizing a kitchen chair and whirling round and round with it in her teeth.

Of the degeneration of vaudeville the most regrettable feature is that it has brought about no change in the character of vaudeville audiences. Perhaps I should say in their personnel, since their character *must* have been affected by all this tawdry bawdry and sensationalism. True, one or two of the down-town theaters have become noted for the "sporty" aspect of their audiences, and, necessarily, all these houses have lost the patronage of women shoppers, country people and stay-at-homes that once were so assiduously courted. Mostly, however, the crowds that flock to such performances are made up of young girls, shop assistants, and respectable middle-class folk who look and listen unblushingly at sights and to sentences they would not tolerate in their own circles. It does not seem pos-



*"Danced before a statue of
Antony until it bit her"*

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sible that this sort of thing can be without its influence upon their lives.

When vaudeville was written down as "spice", however, I had in mind not so much its offences against propriety as its appeal to palates that would reject solid food. Vaudeville addresses itself to amusement seekers incapable of giving, or unwilling to give, concentrated and continuous attention. This kind of entertainment calls for orderliness of mind no more than does the newspaper headline. There is no sequence of thought to be preserved, no logical procession of ideas to be kept in line; the impression of the moment is sufficient and supreme. Naturally, such a performance is attractive to undisciplined brains, to empty brains, and to lazy brains. You need bring to a vaudeville theater nothing but the price of admission. .

. . It is this same asking little that has made the popularity of moving pictures.

Vaudeville has about the same relation to the "theatrical business" that insurance bears to other business. When a business man has failed

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at everything else he tries selling insurance; when a prominent actor has "closed" twice or three times in rapid succession he "goes into vaudeville." The better element is infused without fusing. The regulars are inclined to look askance at these volunteers, resenting the fact that the latter use as a make-shift what *they* have adopted as a profession, and insisting, often not without justice, that, "while big names may draw the crowds, it is our work that holds 'em." I'm afraid the attitude of many recruits does not tend to lessen this friction. "Is there a 'star dressing room?'" a well-known prima donna inquired loftily as she entered the theater where she was to make her debut in "the two a day."

The juggler to whom the question was put, replied: "Yes . . . for falling stars!"

However, many of these "falling stars" perform the strange astronomical feat of climbing back into the heavens. A very large number of the men and women at present heading their own companies have descended into vaudeville,



*"You need bring to a vaudeville
theatre nothing but the price
of admission*

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as Antaeus occasionally descended to earth, to renew their strength. One attractive play and Mr. V. Headliner becomes Mr. Broadway Star. Robert Hilliard had been in the varieties for years when he was restored to "the legitimate" by Porter Emerson Browne's "A Fool There Was." Sarah Bernhardt, as everybody knows, appeared at a music hall in London *en route* to fill her latest engagement in America. Here we have no "Divine Sarah", but vaudeville has sung its siren-song successfully to Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Lily Langtry, Charles Hawtrey, Henrietta Crosman, Henry Miller, Arnold Daly, Lillian Russell, and numberless other mimes of great reputation. This song is most aggravating to producers of musical comedy, whose performers, when the librettist insists upon the preservation of some of his text or when their names do not appear in sufficiently large type on the program, always are ready to "go into vaudeville."

A list of people at present offering one-act plays discloses no fewer than twenty actors and

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actresses of recognized ability. There is Marietta Olly, who did capital work in "The Whirlwind" at Daly's, and Nat C. Goodwin, who, truth to tell, draws a big salary less because of his histrionic than because of his matrimonial versatility. Frank Keenan, Edward Ables, and Maclyn Arbuckle, who has made a hit in Robert Davis' clever comedietta, "The Welcher", have been stars within the twelvemonth and are now in vaudeville, as are also Amelia Bingham, W. H. Thompson, Charles Richman, William Courtleigh, George Beban, Lionel Barrymore, McKee Rankin, Edwin Arden, Sam Chip and Mary Marble. Vaudeville produces its own luminaries, too—Cissie Loftus, for example, and Elsie Janis, who "did a specialty" for years before she was taken up by Charles Dillingham.

Many of the cleverest entertainers in the world are identified exclusively with the varieties. There are Yvette Guilbert, Albert Chevalier, Harry Lauder, and Alice Lloyd, each of whom has a following as large and appreciative as that of Maude Adams or John Drew.

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Other players, less widely known, go round the circuits year after year, making themselves solid with a class of theater-goers that has come to depend upon them for half an hour of amusement. Cressy and Dayne are among these, as are Mr. and Mrs. Perkins D. Fisher, Clayton White, Carrie de Mar, Irene Franklin and Tom Nawn. George Cohan's career began in vaudeville, and no one who has owed twenty minutes of laughter to his ability as a raconteur will ever forget the late Ezra Kendal. Such men as Jesse Lasky and Joseph Hart, recognizing the opportunities of "the two a day", have made elaborate productions of what really are little musical comedies, and have presented them as part of regular variety bills. Mr. Lasky's "The Love Waltz" and "At the Country Club" were as pretentiously staged as any single act in a comic opera.

It is not my desire or disposition to deny the cleverness of these people or the attractiveness of their "turns." I doubt that today the most wearied theater-goer could find a vaudeville bill

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without one or two numbers that would entertain him. The point is that this amusement-seeker would be obliged to take a vast quantity of chaff with his wheat, to review an endless procession of clog dancers, trick bicyclists, wire walkers, trained animals, tramp comedians, acrobats and equilibrists before coming to that part of the program which might interest him. Most of these fillers-in are notable chiefly for the awe-inspiring quality of their English, and for their persistence in performing dangerous feats that, when performed, add nothing to the sum total of human happiness, knowledge or pleasure. I haven't been able to discover why anybody should want to see a lion stand on its head, or a gentleman tie his legs in a true lovers' knot, and I shall never understand the public *penchant* for hearing "The Anvil Chorus" played on tin cans, since it can be played so much better on a piano. One always thinks of the wit who, being informed enthusiastically that some stunt or other was "very difficult", replied: "I wish it were impossible."

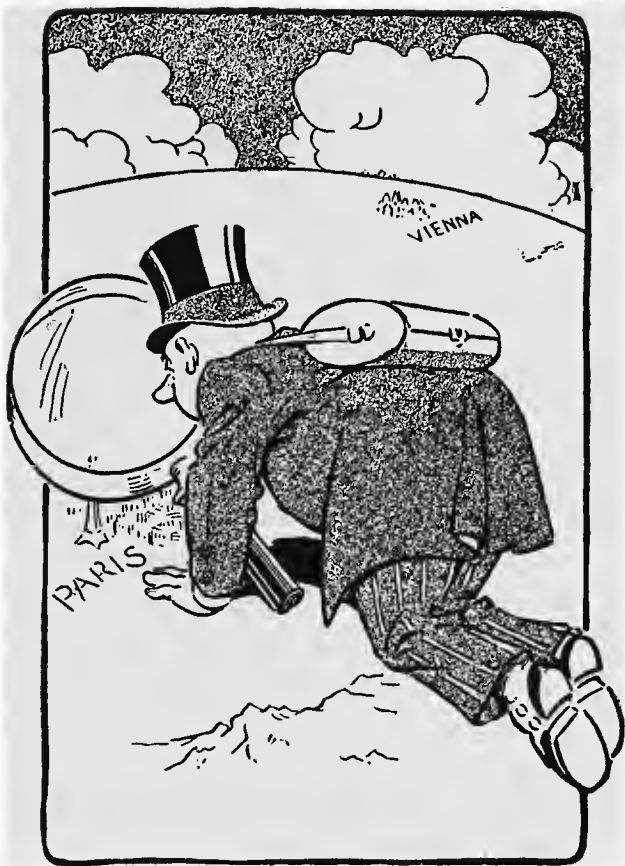
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The worst of the matter is that, there being comparatively few performers of merit, the same people, doing the same things, return again and again to the same theaters. I remember having seen one team of comedy acrobats, Rice and Prevost, seven times in the space of a single season, at the end of which period I had ceased to laugh uproariously when one of the two humorists fell from a table and struck his face violently upon the floor. Half the "turns" at the Victoria this Saturday may be at the Colonial next Monday, so that, unless you wish your entertainment, like your wine, well-aged, you would do well to make your vaudeville excursions to one theater. It is too much to expect the average variety performer to change his act more often than once in a decade, and then he is likely to retain everything that has been especially well received. Of course, you remember George Ade's friends, Zoroaster and Zendavesta, who, at the end of five years, substituted green whiskers for red, and advertised: "Everything New."

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The managers certainly are doing their best to be rid of Zoroasters and Zendavestas. Their agents search every capital of Europe for new talent, and no one makes a hit in the music halls of London or Paris or Berlin without immediately receiving an offer to come to America. Nor is there any limit to the figures mentioned in such an offer. The salaries paid, both for imported and for native talent, were supposed to have reached their utmost height in the palmy days of Keith and Proctor, but they have doubled since Oscar Hammerstein announced on his billboards that he was paying \$1,000 a week to Marie Dressler. There are half a dozen performers now who get \$2,000, and one or two who are reputed to receive even more. Any number of headliners earn five hundred dollars, or seven hundred and fifty dollars, which, you must remember, probably is in excess of the amount tucked into the yellow envelopes of Otis Skinner or Ethel Barrymore.

There is one important difference between the salaries paid in vaudeville and those paid "legit-



"Their agents search every capital of Europe"

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imate'' players. The former cannot consider their earnings as "net", since they are obliged frequently to engage small companies, sometimes numbering twelve or sixteen people, whose wages come out of the sum given their principal. Variety performers defray their own travelling expenses, too, and those of their assistants, together with such other expenses as agents' fees, advertising bills, and similar incidentals. Formerly a great deal of time was lost in long jumps, and between engagements, but managerial combinations have considerably lessened this waste. The successful vaudevillian rarely experiences a break in his bookings now-a-days, and, especially if his act does not depend upon acoustics, he fills out his season with roof gardens, summer parks, and perhaps a circus.

Variety people make up an individual nation in the theatrical world. They have their own language, their own view-point, their own ambitions and grievances, besides their own clubs, hotels and newspapers. The most important of these societies are The Vaudeville Comedy Club,

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which has rooms in Forty-sixth Street and gives an annual benefit, and The White Rats, an aggressive organization that has conducted spunky fights against greedy agents and the black-list of the United Booking Offices. The White Rats publish a weekly periodical, yclept The Player, but the real trade paper of the profession is issued in a green cover and called Variety.

The vaudeville performer—he insists upon al-luding to himself as “the artist”—actually ap-pears on the stage about forty minutes a day. His labor, however, is not quite so light as these figures make it seem. He must put on and take off his makeup afternoon and evening, and he must be in the theater during a good deal of the time that he is not engaged. Monday morning he rehearses with the orchestra, and is assigned a number on the program of the week—vaude-villians, like convicts and hotel guests, being identified by numbers. His place in the bill de-pends upon the length of his “turn”, the stage room required for it, and its nature. Acts that

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can be given in front of a drop "in one" must be sandwiched between "full stage" acts, so that scenes may be set for the latter without interrupting the performance, and the experienced stage manager arranges his material with a keen eye to variety.

As important as the star dressing room to a leading woman, as vital as full-faced type to a star is his place on the bill to a vaudevillian. By their numbers ye shall know them. Headliners are given a position midway in the entertainment, and insist upon it as "legitimate" actors upon the center of the stage. Minor acts open or close a show, and the prejudice against being assigned to either end is so great that many stage managers must sympathize with the Irishman who, being informed that a large per centage of the victims of railway accidents are passengers in the last car of the train, inquired: "Then, bedad, why don't they leave off the last car?"

A layman may ask reasonably how the managers of variety houses are able to pay double

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the salaries that prevail in other theaters, while they exact only half the price of admission. The explanation is simple. In the first place, as has been explained, they pay *nothing but* salaries—neither railway fares nor the cost of costumes and paraphernalia. They are not compelled to make big and expensive productions, to remunerate authors, or, most important of all, to split returns with the managers of theaters in which their shows are given. Henry B. Harris, or Frederic Thompson, presenting “The Country Boy” or “The Spendthrift” at the Chestnut Street Opera House, Philadelphia, or the National Theater, Washington, must divide equally, or nearly equally, with the lessees of those places of amusement. The vaudeville impressario assembles his own show in his own theater, and takes the entire amount paid in at the box office. Even in these times, an exceedingly good bill can be put together for \$3,000, and, if the running expenses of the theatre are \$2,000, there remains a wide margin of profit.

The United Booking Offices, which do busi-

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ness at 1495 Broadway, is as complete a trust as any in America. The "offices" are maintained by a combination that includes all the powerful vaudeville managers, and all the big vaudeville circuits, from New York to San Francisco. There has been sporadic opposition, like that recently made by William Morris, who had the American and Plaza Music Halls in New York and a few others throughout the country, but the end of this opposition always has been compromise or defeat. Performers claim that they are not permitted to play for rival managements under pain of being placed on the dread "black-list", and that, once so placed, they may as well retire from the business. Whether this be true or not—it probably is true—and however high-handed the conduct of the combination, the observer must concede that business-like system, economical methods and complete order have been established by the United Booking Offices.

This combination includes the Hammersteins, father and son, who have the Victoria Theater in

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New York; Percy Williams, who controls the Colonial, the Alhambra, the Bronx, and two theaters in Brooklyn; B. F. Keith, who operates theaters in the metropolis, in Boston, in Philadelphia, and in Providence; and the heads of great circuits like the Orpheum, and Sullivan and Considine's. There are eight handsome vaudeville theaters on Manhattan Island, not counting the burlesque houses and the places at which moving pictures form a large part of the bill, and it is easy to estimate that, if each of these holds fifteen hundred persons at a performance, twenty-four thousand men, women and children witness a variety entertainment every week in New York. This estimate does not include the "sacred concerts", which, in spite of clerical and legal opposition, continue to flourish. On the Sabbath, apparently, the young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of song and dance, and every vaudeville theater in town runs full blast on Sunday.

However bitterly their success may be resented, it is to the newcomers, to the recruits from the

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"legitimate", that vaudeville owes its steady advancement. One may sympathize with the acrobat who, after a life time spent in acquiring proficiency in his specialty, sees the big salaries being paid to men who devoted a week to rehearsing some sketch, and who couldn't turn a handspring to save their souls. The fact remains that vaudeville's claim to the consideration of intelligent people rests largely upon these tabloid comedies and dramas. The vogue of such clever little plays as "At the Telephone", "The Man From the Sea", "Circumstantial Evidence", "In Old Edam", "When Pat Was King", "The Welcher" and "The Flag Station"—which, by the way, was written by Eugene Walter, author of "The Easiest Way"—marks a step forward in the possibilities of "the two a day." It enables such men as Will Cressy, whose whole output has been of sketches, to venture upon higher ground, and it banishes more surely the mixture of buffoonery and maudlin sentiment that formerly passed as play-lets.

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The progress made in this sort of entertainment is indicated by the unequivocal success of Frank Keenan in "The Oath", an intense little tragedy, founded upon a theme used by Lope de Vega. Only ten years ago this same Frank Keenan suffered complete lack of appreciation of his fine work in an adaptation of Poe's "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Feather." Many well-made sketches, logically planned and skillfully written, still owe their presence in vaudeville wholly to the reputation of their stars. "The Walsingham", as Walsingham Potts used to say in Madison Morton's farce of "A Regular Fix", "is a sort of guava jelly in which you swallow the bitter pill, Potts." Other one act dramas of great merit fail altogether.

London successes like "The Monkey's Paw", and Paris successes, like "The Submarine" and "After the Opera", have ended miserably in New York. Such authors as Clyde Fitch have seen their work retired after a fortnight's trial. Two tabloid pieces, "Dope" and "By-Products", from the pen of Joseph Medill Patterson, auth-

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or of "The Fourth Estate", after scoring triumphs of esteem in Chicago, have not been given bookings in the East. It is not yet true that any three one-act plays in vaudeville, if given continuity and put together, would make a passable three act play, but there are optimists among us who feel that that time will come. We believe that, without being less entertaining, less diversified, or less easily enjoyed, vaudeville will come to be made up of fewer "Jewish" or "Irish" comedians, fewer "sister acts", fewer trained seals, and a greater number of people who have something really clever to offer in song or speech or impersonation.

The place of the tabloid drama is secure, since it bears the same relation to the ordinary drama that the short story does to the novel. One day we shall have a Theatre Antoine or a Theatre des Capucines in New York. The popularity of the short play, with all its opportunities for skillful construction and good acting, will follow as the night the day. The nudities and lewdities of last year and this are but a passing

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phase. Whatever vaudeville was in the past, or is in the present, it offers endless promise for the future.

WITH THE PEOPLE "IN STOCK"

Concerning Camille, ice cream, spirituality, red silk tights, Blanche Bates, Thomas Betterton, second-hand plays, parochialism, matinee girls, Augustin Daly, and other interesting topics.

"**W**HY is a resident theatrical organization known as a *stock* company?" Blanche Bates repeated after me one afternoon when she was playing in "The Dancing Girl" at the Columbia Theater, Washington. "Simply because the people in it work like horses."

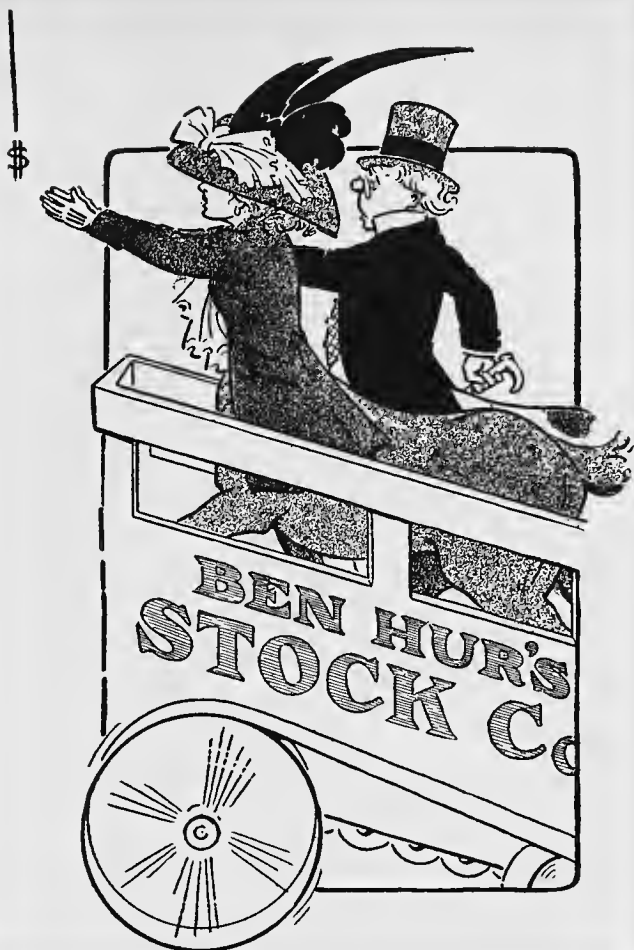
Miss Bates, whose name at that time probably was as unfamiliar to David Belasco as any word in Arabic, knew whereof she spoke. She had been for several seasons with T. Daniel Frawley in San Francisco, she had had four roles and a row with Augustin Daly inside of two months in New York, and finally she had cast her lot with a combination that was whiling away the summer months by producing a new piece

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every week in the hottest city in America. After a little time I'm going to tell you just what labor is involved in producing a new—or, rather, a different—piece every week. For the present, suffice it to say that Miss Bates' witticism was founded on a whimsical view of facts, and that the modern stock company is exclusively responsible for the existence of that amazing anomaly, a hard-working actor.

Most actors are kept fairly busy three weeks each year, that period being devoted to rehearsing the one play in which they appear during the course of a season. Throughout the remainder of eight months they are actually occupied about four hours per diem, and at the end of these eight months they count on having four months for rest, recreation and relaxation. This is not at all true of the man or woman "in stock", who, in the language of the street, "is on the job" twenty-four hours a day and, when there is special need of exertion, gets up an hour earlier in the morning to make it twenty-five.

The great bulk of New York theater-goers,



*"Known as a stock company
because the people in
it work like horses"*

WITH THE PEOPLE IN STOCK

with the parochialism that characterizes them, know practically nothing about stock companies. Perhaps, the chief reason of this is that within the memory of man they never have had fewer than five at one time. Stock companies in Philadelphia or Boston they might have studied at long distance as curious institutions, but never stock companies so unappealingly near as Fifty-eighth Street and Lexington Avenue. Your blithe Broadwayite leaves such places of amusement to the people in their neighborhood, and sticks to musical comedy in the vicinity of Times Square.

Broadway used to keep close track of stock companies when the two Frohmans had fine organizations at the old Lyceum and at the Empire—when John Drew and Henry Miller and Georgia Cayvan were seen in such new pieces as "The Grey Mare" and "The Charity Ball." Fifth Avenue is beginning to re-make an acquaintance with the scheme of resident organizations, through the medium of that at the New Theatre, and Charles Frohman recently has announced his intention of estab-

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lishing an important stock company under the directorship of William Gillette. This announcement brings with it high hopes; the very suggestion calls to mind the departed glories, not only of the Empire and the Lyceum, but of the Union Square, Daly's, and the Madison Square.

The stock company with which we have become familiar of late has been a very different kind of affair. Its field has been limited, and the purpose of its managers merely the giving of old plays at popular prices. If you have been in the world long enough to learn that whatever is cheap in price is cheap in quality—that no merchant deliberately sells at a loss—you will have little difficulty in understanding that, with rare exceptions, the performances offered have been mediocre. Sixteen, eighteen or twenty fairly competent actors and actresses are formed into a cast that prepares a different play every week in its season. The plays generally have had their day in the hands of regular traveling organizations. It is not often that the result has in it more than three letters from the word

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"artistic." Such aggregations have held forth in Gotham at various times on the stages of the American, the Fifty-eighth Street, the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, the Yorkville, the Fifth Avenue, the Murray Hill, the West End, the Plaza, and other theaters. They used to be particularly indigenous to that portion of our metropolitan soil known as Harlem, but now are confined almost entirely to Brooklyn.

This brand of stock company, which we may as well label "The Contemporary Brand", had its origin in some large Eastern city where an enterprising theatrical manager planned to provide summer amusement for such of his patrons as wanted to stay in town through the hot weather—and for the husbands of those who didn't. The traveling troupes had all shut up for a few months, so this manager was obliged to form an organization of his own. I'll bet that, at the same time, he originated the story about installing a pipe system for distributing cool air throughout his house—a pleasant little Christian Science lie that since has become classic. How-

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ever that may be, the venture paid. Imitation is called initiative in the theatrical business, and the following year there were fifty "summer stock companies." Then somebody discovered that these combinations, playing at low prices, had attracted a *clientele* of their own, that they drew people whose purses would not permit their visiting the best theaters, and whose taste stood between them and the other houses. So somebody else tried running a stock company all through the season, and succeeded. Within a little time there were enterprises of this sort in most cities of the size of Pittsburg or Cincinnati; then they crept into towns like Hartford and Providence; now-a-days any village populous enough to boast of two saloons, a church and a dry goods store has also its opera house and its stock company.

In the big cities these aggregations of histrionic talent generally offer a fresh play every week; in some of the smaller places two are given in the course of seven days. One play a week is the usual thing, however, and the amount of labor it involves is stupendous. Not only must

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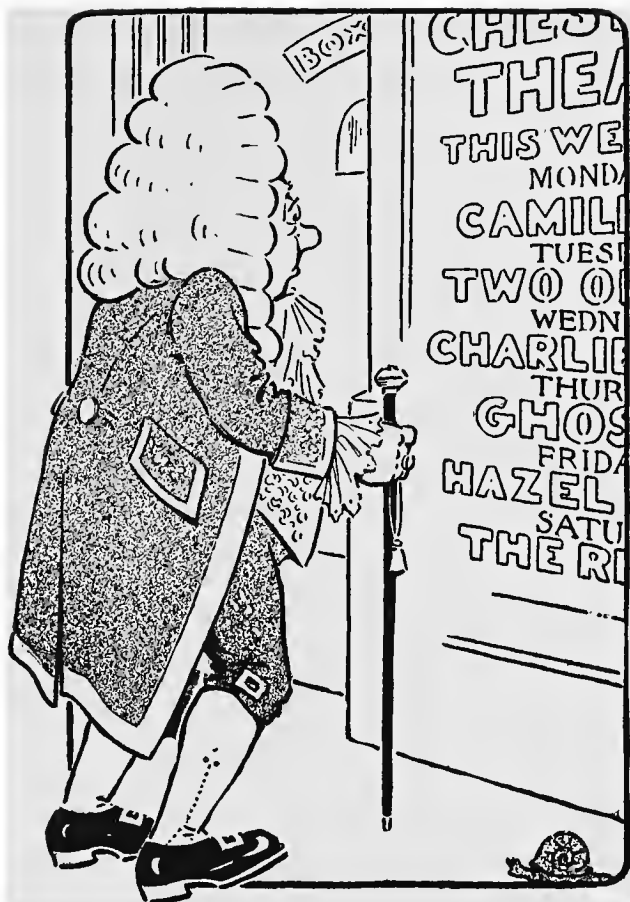
that one play be prepared in the time mentioned, but simultaneously the company must be thinking of and acting another play—that already being performed for the benefit of the public. Dr. Doran, in his "Annals of the Stage", speaks of the hard work accomplished by actors in the Eighteenth Century, when Thomas Betterton "created a number of parts never equaled by any subsequent actor—namely, one hundred and thirty." The good doctor, who waxes quite enthusiastic over Betterton, adds: "In some single seasons he studied and represented no less than eight original parts—an amount of labor that would shake the nerves of the stoutest among us now." Dr. Doran's esteemed friend, Master Betterton, probably would have had his own nerves a good deal shaken had he found himself in this year of our Lord 1911—say at the Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia.

Vitcory Bateman, a charming actress whose health recently was reported to be seriously affected by the strain of the work she had done in stock companies, played twenty leading roles

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in five months. Of these and the number of words in each she gives the following account in a book she wrote in collaboration with Ada Patterson:

Mrs. Winthrop in "Young Mrs. Winthrop"	7,000
Floradilla in "A Fool's Re- venge"	6,750
Louise in "The Two Orphans"	7,250
Cecile in "David Laroque"....	6,500
Adrienne in "A Celebrated Case"	7,000
Camille in "Camille".....	7,300
Carmen in "Carmen".....	7,200
Portia in "Julius Caesar".....	6,500
Eliza in "Uncle Tom's Cabin".	7,500
Ruth in "The Wages of Sin"..	6,000
Juliet in "Romeo and Juliet"...	7,500
Dora in "Diplomacy".....	6,900
Portia in "The Merchant of Venice"	7,600
Ophelia in "Hamlet".....	7,000



*"Master Betterton would have
had his nerves a good deal
shaken"*

WITH THE PEOPLE IN STOCK

Mrs. Gregory Graxin in "The Tragedy"	6,500
Desdemona in "Othello"	7,000
Alice in "In Spite of All"	7,500
Frou-Frou in "Frou-Frou"	7,000
Vera in "Moths"	6,000
Roxane in "Cyrano"	8,000

Total..... 140,000 words

Some of the details of this statement strike me as being erroneous. I do not believe, for example, that Roxane is a longer part than Juliet. One thing I do not doubt—that the average stock leading woman learns 140,000 words in a season. And 140,000 words, we must understand, are the number contained in two fair-sized novels or "fourteen pages of a large newspaper."

The mere statement that so much matter has to be committed to memory does not give a fair idea of the amount of work that has to be accomplished by the actor or the actress—espe-

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cially the actress—under these conditions. In addition to learning each role she must rehearse it. These rehearsals will occupy every morning of the six days whose afternoons and evenings are devoted to the public performance of another part. In addition, the actress must figure on giving time to dressmakers, since each character must be properly costumed; to wig makers and to allegedly unavoidable social duties. The inevitable result is a crudity and carelessness in the interpretation of plays that would not be tolerated by any theater-goers in the world except those that do tolerate it. This can be better understood when one learns that the average time spent in the preparation of a piece to run in New York is something like three weeks—three weeks in which the players have nothing else to occupy their minds.

The members of the ordinary stock company scarcely pretend to know their lines before the third repetition of the comedy or drama in hand. John Findlay, a fine old actor, used to complain to me that always he "had just begun to under-



*"The actress must figure
on giving time to dressmakers"*

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stand what a piece was about when they took it off and put on another." I remember an amusing incident in connection with a rendering of a certain light comedy by a stock company in Baltimore. A scene in this comedy was divided between two men, one of them seated at a desk and the other standing before that article of furniture with his hat in his hand. Both actors having forseen opportunities of concealing their manuscripts where they could see them and the audience could not, neither had learned a single word of the dialogue. The first player had his part on the desk; the second hid it in his hat. But the second man had forgotten that, at a critical moment, the office boy was supposed to take that hat. The moment arrived, the boy took the hat, and the unlucky Thespian, at his wits' end, could think of nothing better to do than read the remainder of his speeches over the shoulder of his colleague.

Opening nights with stock companies would be dreadful affairs, but for that kindly provision of Fate, "the old stock actor." There usually

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are three or four of this man and woman in an organization, and each of the three or four, at one time or another, has played nearly every part known to his or her "line of business." Your "old stock actor", who need not be old as to years, will be familiar with half the roles entrusted to him or her in a season, so that a little study serves to prompt recollection of the lines, and even such memory of details as may be of great assistance when communicated to the stage director.

Unfortunately, scenery and other accessories cannot share this advantage. The small town stock company possesses eight or ten regular settings and a scene painter, whose efforts usually are confined to retouching shabby spots on the canvas and to coloring furniture, cannon, trees and similar trifles. Occasionally he paints new wall paper and pictures, which, with the blessed aid of the stage carpenter, who can change windows from left to right and doors from right to left, transform the banquet hall of some Roman noble (Period 40 B. C.) to the

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front room of a Harlem apartment (Period 1911 A. D.) A week doesn't allow much time for accuracy, and mine eyes have seen the tent of Mark Antony electric lighted, Louis XVI chairs in the palace of Macbeth, and a Queen Ann cottage occupied by Shylock and his daughter Jessica.

When melo-drama is produced worse horrors than this are likely to intrude themselves upon first nights. Balky locomotives *will* refuse to run over prostrate heroines, and I once witnessed a *premier* matinee of "The Gunner's Mate" at which the jib boom displayed a most distressing *penchant* for knocking off the helmet of the ship's Captain. Stage management frequently is responsible for even worse blunders.

The theater-goers who frequent the homes of stock companies—they are, for the most part, wives of sign painters and journeyman printers—don't seem to mind things of this sort in the least. Early in the season they begin to pick favorites in the organization, and they follow the annual progress of such play-acting pilgrims with

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great care. The value of a man or woman to his or her stock company depends largely upon his or her personal following, and I have known leading men to be so sure of this following that, upon being dismissed, they have harangued crowds on the street in front of their theaters. This very episode, by the way, occurred only a few years ago in New York.

Matinee idols achieve popularity, not according to their own deserts, but according to the heroism of the folk they impersonate in the course of a season. It might be estimated safely that one opportunity at Sydney Carton, one at Armand Duval, and one at Romeo would establish the least prepossessing of leading men in the marshmallowy affections of the stock company matinee girl. These young women and their neighbors have singularly distorted ideas of good acting, and their partizanship makes them blind to the imperfections of their favorite players. In Brooklyn it used to be a common thing to hear that Cecil Spooner was much better than Mrs. Leslie Carter as Zaza, and a little time ago

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Pittsburg did not hesitate to put Sarah Truax above Mrs. Fiske for her impersonation of Nora.

The manager who successfully pilots a stock company through the shoals and shallows of forty weeks must have uncommon perspicacity. Not alone must he secure players who are likely to become popular, but, more important still, he must select plays that will appeal to all of his patrons all of the time. Too much tragedy and he is quite sure to lose the men in his gallery; too much comedy and the girls in the orchestra begin to thin out. Then, too, his purse must be considered. The rental of popular plays is high. When first the piece was released for stock the royalties asked for "Peter Pan" were a thousand dollars per week. Few plays bring as much as this, but royalties rarely are under one hundred dollars and generally range between two hundred and fifty and four hundred. Of course, there are many dramatic works whose age makes them anybody's property, and the skillful manager balances his profit and loss

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neatly by sandwiching these in with the costly ones. When you see that your pet stock company is to follow "Salomy Jane" with "Camille" you may be sure that its manager is evening up matters on his books.

The same degree of skill that is required in other theatrical advertising is required of the man who conducts a stock company. Various odd schemes have been tried with effect, the best seeming to be that of giving things away. There are now various theaters at which food and drink is served between acts, generally eliciting real evidences of appreciation. Personally, I cannot see how a bad performance of "Too Much Johnson" with ice cream would be more endurable than the same performance without, but apparently this failure on my part indicates a unique state of mind. Receptions on the stage, at which the public meets the players, have proved an attraction, and they have the additional merit of helping to establish the necessary *entente cordiale*. The distribution of actors' photographs, the inauguration of guessing and



"Evening up matters on his books"

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voting contests, and similar features, keep alert the brain of the man at the helm of the small town "stock."

To the most casual reader even this very casual article must have made apparent the disadvantages of the average resident aggregation. First among these, perhaps, is the impossibility of producing new plays under a system which requires the presentation of fresh material so frequently. A new play cannot possibly be rehearsed in a week. This is a misfortune to the company, which must develop its best talent in unhackneyed vehicles; a misfortune to the public, which must tire of seeing second-handed comedies and tragedies; and most of all a misfortune to the inner circle of theatrical folk, to whom the stock organization should offer unrivalled opportunities for the quick and inexpensive testing of untried manuscripts.

Since new plays are not within the range of these organizations, it seems a pity that they cannot be allowed more leisurely preparation of the old. Performances never can be good, much

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less artistic, while they are made ready as rapidly as is necessary at present. Neither can they be good so long as a certain small body of people must divide among them whatever parts offer, regardless of equipment or natural tendencies. Because Minnie Jones is suited to the *ingenue* role in this week's farce it does not follow that she will be ideal in the *ingenue* role of the tragedy done next week.

We hear that this sort of thing means excellent histrionic training, but there is no law compelling audiences to attend training schools, and the results of putting square pegs into any old sort of hole are often too ludicrous. It is appalling to reflect that the lady who plays Mrs. Micawber today may be cast for Du Barry tomorrow. I remember one poor little girl who had been engaged to "do" soubrettes at the National Theater, Washington. She was a charming little thing, and for a whole season she successfully met all comers of her weight and age. In "Esmeralda" I recall having thought her the most ethereal of women. Two weeks later

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she became the comic opera star in "All the Comforts of Home," and I discovered that what was spirituality in "Esmeralda" became emaciation in red silk tights.

Much as I have harped on the disadvantages of the stock company, I believe most solemnly that its advantages are over-balancing. Even bad bread is better for the system than good whiskey, and a crude performance of "Romeo and Juliet" is to be preferred to the best possible performance of "The Girl and the Outlaw." The prices for these "attractions" are about the same, and the people who now go to see "Romeo and Juliet" are precisely the people who otherwise would go to see "The Girl and the Outlaw." Slowly but surely, even the current stock company interpretations educate the taste of theater-lovers, until they begin asking for better things, and, seeking, find. In addition, there seems no doubt that these organizations provide exceptional schooling for young actors, who, by their aid, play two or three hundred parts in a period during which otherwise they

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would play five. It has been urged against this that they also acquire habits of haste and carelessness, but I always have found actors with stock experience superior to those without it. The consequence of this particular phase of the stock system must be of inestimable value to the theater in America.

Then, too, it is a kind of interchangeable cause and effect that the quality of stock performances improves with the taste of their patrons. Of late years, fewer autographed photographs have been distributed among audiences, and more money has been spent in the painting of proper scenery. Manner has been less frequently required for stage receptions, and more frequently for drawing room drama. The combination of several organizations under one management, like that of the Baker Chain, in Seattle, Portland and Spokane, with consequent possibilities of reciprocal borrowing, has accomplished wonders in the way of betterment.

"Out West", where touring companies are rarer than this side of the Missouri, and where

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metropolitan successes arrive tardily, notably fine stock aggregations have come largely to take the place of visiting stars. There are two excellent companies located in Los Angeles, and I have heard that the superiority of their performances has seriously injured the business of the "first class" theaters. John Blackwood, at the Belasco, and Oliver Morosco, at the Burbank, make complete productions of every piece offered, and often they are able to give Los Angelites their first view of some much-discussed triumph of Broadway. In such cases, it is not unusual for the play to last six or eight weeks, and George Broadhurst's "The Dollar Mark", initially presented at the Belasco, had a longer run there than in New York. It will be seen at once how such public support enables a company to be worthier of support—a kind of beneficent perpetual motion.

While the East is not yet so far advanced, nor so nearly rid of the stock company that has been made typical in this article, there are fine organizations in half a dozen of our larger cities. It

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can be only a matter of time before enforced haste and economy in staging stock performances will disappear before the demands of a more and more enlightened clientele. There will be a greater number of rehearsals and a smaller number of matinees. The people who patronize these presentations now will have got ahead in the world, and will be able and willing to pay more generously for their entertainment, and it is to be hoped that the people who turned to moving pictures from cheap melodrama—which, in its whilom prosperity, we are to consider in our next chapter—in due time may turn from moving pictures to adequate representations of classic, standard and popular plays.

All this will come in the nature of evolution. The movement will be accelerated if Charles Frohman keeps his promise of giving us in New York such a stock company as his brother maintained at the old Lyceum, and which, at the same time, included Edward J. Morgan, William Courtleigh, George C. Boniface, Mary Manning, Elizabeth Tyree, Mrs. Charles Walcot,

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Hilda Spong, Grant Stewart, Mrs. Thomas Whiffen, and John Findlay.

SITTING IN JUDGMENT WITH THE GODS

Being an old manuscript with a new preface—the former dealing with a lost art, and the latter subtly suggesting who lost it.

THE article that fills the following pages was written in 1905. Originally printed as a protest and a prophecy, it is reprinted here as history.

Melodrama is dead. It died of poor circulation and failure of the box office receipts. There were no flowers, and there need be no regrets. Neither is there reason to fear resuscitation.

I should like to think that popular priced melodrama had been killed by a general desire for better things. That, however, is not the case. The death blow was struck when the inventor of moving pictures supplied a form of entertainment that demanded even less of the spectator than had been demanded by such classics as "Through Death Valley" and "The

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Millionaire and the Policeman's Wife." The people who patronized these plays are not now patronizing worthier plays; they are attending performances that appeal to them wholly through the medium of the eye.

Of the seven theaters mentioned in this article at present three are devoted to moving pictures, two to burlesque, one to vaudeville, and one to drama in Yiddish. A few cheap companies are presenting melodrama in the provinces, but not a single place of amusement shelters it in New York. Requiescat in pace.

"Sitting in Judgment With the Gods" is republished as a contemporary opinion of a lost art. It was my intention to alter the wording somewhat, substituting more recent examples for those mentioned, but I found the result was apt to be like a history of Rome brought "up-to-date" by introducing gattling guns at the Battle of Pharsalius. So here is the story as it was set down in the beginning, and may you find amusement in reading it.

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Melodrama, according to my dictionary, is "a dramatic performance, usually tragic, in which songs are introduced." The encyclopedia adds that the name was bestowed first upon "the opera by Rinuccini", and that it was derived from two Greek words meaning song and drama. This is extremely awesome and impressive, but I'm afraid I can't allow you to accept it as applying to offerings in our popular-priced places of amusement. Melodrama isn't a bit like that in New York.

It was the dictionary that started me on a tour of investigation which comprehended visits to all of the seven theaters in town that habitually present melodrama. There are so many classes of people in this big city, and each class has so many characteristic ways of working and playing, that no one hundredth of the population can be expected to know how any other one hundredth lives. The men and women who go to see "Man and Superman" don't go to see "No Mother to Guide Her", and I think I am quite safe in saying that most of the men and

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women who witness "No Mother to Guide Her" are conspicuous by their absence at "Man and Superman."

Sitting in judgment with the gods leaves me in doubt as to why the latter part of this statement should be true. The plays of the "No Mother to Guide Her" type are so hopelessly bad, so obviously false, so absolutely vicious, that it is hard to comprehend a mind that can prefer them, if not to "Man and Superman", at least to such better melodramas as "The Lion and the Mouse" or "The Squaw Man." The matter of money is no explanation at all. Harry and Harriet might have excellent seats in the balcony of the Lyceum or Wallack's for the price of orchestra chairs at the American, and, if it comes to pride, what choice is there between the gallery, politely disguised as "the second balcony," of the Belasco, and a box at the Thalia?

Melodrama today not only differs from the melodrama of day-before-yesterday defined in the dictionary, but it differs too from the melo-

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drama of yesterday. Bartley Campbell and Dion Boucicault have given way to Theodore Kremer and Martin Hurley, while sterling old plays like "Siberia" and "The Octoroon" have been supplanted by such monstrosities as "Why Girls Leave Home" and "Too Proud to Beg." Our dramatic literature knows no finer examples of play-building than "The Two Orphans" and "The Rommany Rye", but these pieces are popular no longer with the people who frequent the Fourteenth Street and the Third Avenue. Fading interest in works of that kind led to a falling off in the patronage of "popular-priced" houses which was arrested only by an immediate appeal to the lowest and basest passions of which mankind is capable. It is on the power of pandering to these passions that the present vogue of melodrama is founded.

Emile Zola, that great photographer of souls, would have found in a visit to one of New York's low-priced theaters unlimited scope for analysis of character, comment on decay, and description of dirt and squalor. The Murray

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Hill Theater, the Third Avenue, the Thalia, the American and the Metropolis, five of the seven local places of amusement given up to sensational plays, are relics of infinitely better days. The Thalia was known formerly as the Bowery Theater, and its stage has supported nearly all the great actors of an earlier time. McKee Rankin, in his palmiest period, directed the fortunes of the Third Avenue, while each of the other three houses was intended originally for the best class of productions. The New Star, alone among buildings of its class, has no history except that it is making now.

The Thalia, where I began my travels, is full of contrasts. Evidences of departed grandeur elbow old dirt and new gaudiness. In the lobby, with its marble floor and lofty ceiling, stand hard-faced officials in uniforms that glitter with gold braid. Lithographic representations of various kinds of crime and violence hang on the walls, advertising the attraction to follow that holding the boards. The auditorium is archi-

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tecturally stately and old fashioned, bearing an outline resemblance to the colosseum at Rome. The ground floor is a succession of steps, on each of which is a row of seats, while three balconies of horse-shoe shape afford opportunities to the patron whose financial limit is ten, twenty or thirty cents. There are queer little boxes on either side of the stage, which slopes perceptibly and has in its middle a prompter's hood—survival of the days when parts were so long, and so many had to be learned each week, that no actor could be trusted out of sight of the man with the manuscript. The Thalia is a theatrical anachronism, dilapidated, decayed and degraded. It is a royal sepulchre containing rags and old iron, a family mansion utilized as a boarding house, a Temple of Thespis managed by "Al" Woods and devoted, on the night of my visit, to the representation of a stirring comedy drama in five acts, entitled "Lured From Home."

The audiences at the Thalia are composed principally of peddlers, 'longshoremen and girls



"The Thalia's stage has supported nearly all the great actors of an earlier time"

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from the sweat shops. Farther up town one sees sailors and mechanics, with a sprinkling of families large enough, numerically and physically, to delight Roosevelt. Everywhere small boys abound and Jews predominate. Perched aloft in the gallery, one picks out scores of types and observes dozens of humorous incidents. Down town there were men who took off their coats and kept on their hats, probably for no better reason than that they were supposed to do neither. A fat negress sat next to a loudly dressed shop girl, who was too absorbed to draw the color line while the performance was in progress, but glared furiously between acts. The contention that the Third Avenue is "a family theater" was supported by a mother who nursed her baby whenever the curtain was down and the lights up. Two precocious youths discussed the "form" of certain horses that were to race next day, while their "best goils", one on either side, alternately stared at each other and at their programs. Reference to this bill of the play, printed by the same firm that supplies pro-

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grams for the better class of theaters, disclosed the fact that a large part of the pamphlet was devoted to articles on "What the Man Will Wear" and "Chafing Dish Suggestions." It seemed to me that these indicated utter lack of a sense of humor on the part of publisher and manager. "The Man" at the Third Avenue probably wears whatever is cheapest, and I can't fancy the woman feeling a keen interest in oyster pan toast or orange mousse.

Barring a little difference in millinery and a difference of opinion as to the indispensability of neckwear, the audiences at all these theaters are very much alike. They read pink papers assiduously before the play begins and eat industriously throughout the intermissions. Melodrama seems to affect the American appetite much as does an excursion. You may have noticed that lunches appear the moment a pleasure trip begins, and every cessation of histrionic action at a popular-priced house is a signal for the munching of apples, candy, pop-corn, peanuts or chewing gum. Most of the material for

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these feasts is furnished by small boys who begin the evening selling "song books" and conclude it dispensing provisions. Just as the orchestra emerges from under the stage the merchant appears, taking his place at the foot of an aisle and unburdening his soul of a carefully prepared announcement. "I wish to call your attention for just about a few minutes to the company's 'song book' ", he commences. These volumes invariably are marked down from ten to five cents, and, for good measure, the vendor throws in an old copy of *The Police Gazette*. Sweets are his stock in trade between acts, though one also has the pleasure of hearing him announce: "Now, friends, I've a postal card guaranteed to make you laugh without any trouble."

Reserve is not a characteristic of these gatherings. They hiss steamily at what they are pleased to consider evil, and applaud with equal heartiness that which seems to them good. Especially remarkable instances of virtue also bring out shrill whistles, verbal comment and the

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stamping of feet. The management maintains in the gallery a play censor with a club, who knocks loudly against the railing when he feels that these evidences of approval are passing bounds. What would not your two dollar impressario give if he could transplant this enthusiasm to Broadway? How gladly Charles Frohman or Henry W. Savage would trade his surfeited first night audience for one of those which requires only an heroic speech to wear out its individual hands in frenzied applause!

They are a queer, child-like lot—the people who compose the clientele of the Murray Hill and the Third Avenue. Intermissions have to be made short for them, because they have not the patience to wait for setting scenery, and he would be an intrepid dramatist who would put sufficient faith in the intensity of a situation to trust to its keeping them quiet in the dark. To an assembly at the Thalia the turning out of the lights for the husband's confession in "The Climbers" would have proved only an opportunity for making weird noises without danger



"A play censor with a club"

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of being "spotted" by the "bouncer." Their tastes are primitive and their sympathies elemental. They have no time for fine distinctions between right and wrong; a character is good to them or it is bad, and there's an end to the matter. Ready and waiting with their pity, one cannot help believing that they feel only on the surface, since they are quite able to forget the tragedy of one moment in the comedy of the next. I have seen them sob like babies at the death of a child in the play and break into uproarious laughter a second later at the intrusion of the soubrette. Their prejudices are explicable, but unexpectedly strong, favoring the unfortunate under any circumstances and finding vent in bitter hatred of the prosperous. They are the natural enemies of the police officer, and, by the same token, friends to the cracksman or the convict who expresses a particle of decency. Physical heroism is the only kind these men and women recognize, and emphasis rather than ethics influences their verdict on questions of virtue and vice. Appar-

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ently the element of surprise is not a dramatic requisite with them, since every habitual playgoer of their class must know by heart every melodramatic theme in existence, together with its incidents and its outcome. Undivided in their approval of the noble and their disapproval of the ignoble, one soon learns that their ideas on the subject are theories not intended for practice. The man who most loudly applauds defence of a woman on the stage is not always above disciplining his wife vigorously when he gets home. "Zash right!" I heard an inebriate call to a melodramatic hero who had spurned the glass offered him. "Zash right! Don't you tush it!"

I have said that the stories and situations of melodrama must be familiar to the folk who attend such performances, and I speak advisedly. One melodrama is as much like another as are two circuses. Drifting into the American one night just as the players were indulging themselves in that walk before the curtain which is their traditional method of acknowledging a

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"call", I might easily have mistaken the principal pedestrians for the characters I had seen fifteen minutes before at the Third Avenue. There they were without exception—the sailor-hero, the wronged heroine in black, the high-hatted villain, the ragged child, the short-skirted soubrette, the police officer, the apple woman, the negro and the comic Jew. Some of these types, notably the apple woman and the negro, are as old as melodrama, while others are but recently borrowed from vaudeville. Whatever their origin, they are the handy puppets of the man who writes this kind of play; identified the moment they step on the stage and hissed or applauded according to the conduct expected of them.

This sameness of character is paralleled by a sameness of dialogue that is amazing. Few melodramatic heroes do very much to justify their popularity, but all of them have a pugilistic fondness for talking about what they are going to do. Certain phrases favored by this class of playwright have been used so often that

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the most casual theater-goer will be able to recall them. "I can and will", "my child", "stand back", "on his track", "do your worst", "you are no longer a son of mine" and "if he knew all" are convenient terms for expressing a variety of violent emotions. Most of them mean nothing specific, and herein lies their recommendation. It is so much easier to say "if he knew all" than to figure out precisely what part of a purple past is of sufficient theatrical value to be dilated upon in a speech.

Apropos of purple pasts and of heroines in black, it is worthy of note that propriety in the hue of one's garb is another of the inviolable conventions in the cheap theaters. Olga Nethersole probably thought she was doing a wonderfully original thing some years ago when she announced that she would wear various colors to typify the regeneration of Camille, but a chromatic index to character antedates the English actress by many decades. To anybody acquainted with sensational plays a white dress means innocence, a black dress suffering and a

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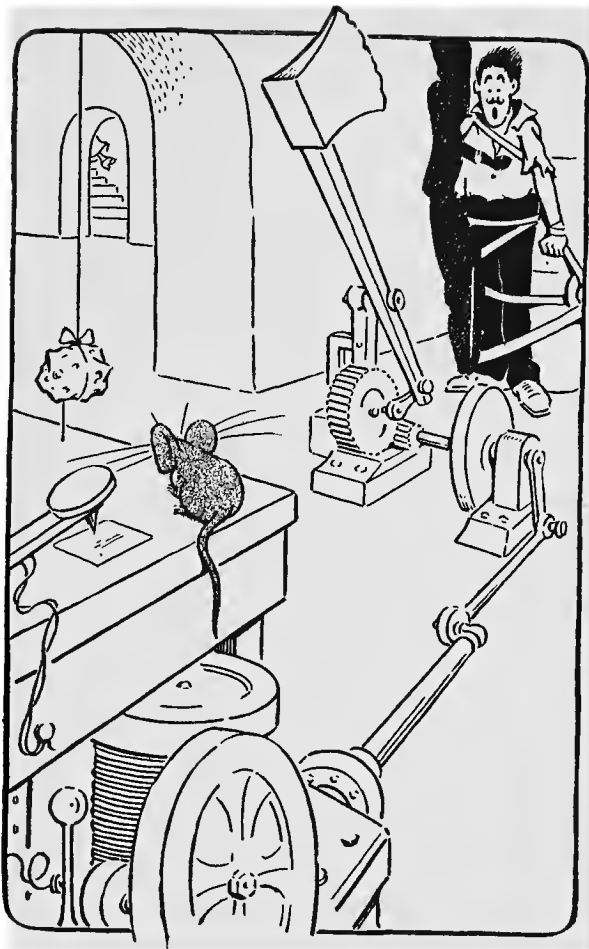
red dress guilt just as infallibly as the cigarette habit had a *penchant* for sitting on the arms of chairs indicates utter depravity in a female. If you told an Eighth Avenue amusement-lover that good women sometimes smoke and often sit on the arms of chairs he wouldn't believe you.

With puppets and speeches to be had ready-made, the receipt for writing a melodrama would not seem to be particularly complicated. The favorite story for a piece of this sort concerns two men—one poor and good, the other wealthy and bad—who love the same girl. For that reason and because the hero “stands between” him and “a fortune”, the villain plans to “get him out of the way.” The soubrette saves the intended victim from death, the would-be assassin is disgraced, and the play “ends happily.” There may be a dozen variations of this theme, such as an effort to send the hero to prison “for another’s crime”, but, until managers found a gold mine in the lechery of their low-browed patrons, it formed the central thread of four offerings out of five. The stock

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plot now-a-days is the frustration of sundry attempts to sell women to waiting despoilers; the dramatization of what the newspapers describe, hideously enough, as "white slavery." This is an unpleasant subject in any form, but the part it plays in current melodrama is so gross and evil that I shall risk referring to it again in another paragraph.

The "fortune" that serves as bone of contention in the tale related above never happens to be less than a million. Such trifling sums as fifty thousand pounds or a hundred thousand dollars are given very little consideration in melodrama. Everyone of importance lives in a "mansion" and carries about huge rolls of greenbacks. When the villain tries to murder the hero he resists the temptation to stab or shoot him quickly and quietly, having found the expedient of binding him across a railway track or throwing his insensible body on a feed belt more conducive to a thrilling rescue. Hand-made murder has no place in melodrama; all reputable scoundrels do their killing by machin-



*"All reputable scoundrels do
their killing by machinery"*

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ery. The strongest situation possible in the sensational play is that in which the comedienne flags the train or stops the belt. Next to this "big scene" is the inevitable encounter between the villain with a knife, the unarmed hero, and the heroine, who arrives with a revolver at what Joseph Cawthorne calls "the zoological moment." I have seen the superiority of the pistol over the dagger demonstrated five times in a single melodrama, yet the villain never seems to profit by experience. One would think he would learn to carry a "gun", just as one would think that the hero would learn not to leave his coat where stolen bills might be placed in the pockets, but the playwrights of the popular-priced theaters seem to model their people on the dictum of Oscar Wilde, who said: "There are two kinds of women—the good women, who are stupid, and the bad women, who are dangerous." Notwithstanding their crass improbabilities, many melodramas of the better sort are interesting and not without occasional evidences of clumsy originality and crude strength.

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I enjoyed eight or ten genuine thrills in the course of my tour of inspection.

If I was thrilled ten times, however, I was sickened and disgusted a thousand times at the appeal to low animalism that has become the dominant factor in these houses. Remembering the legal obstacles put in the path of "Mrs. Warren's Profession," I could not help wondering whether the Comstockians wear blinders that shut from their view everything East and West of Broadway. Even if their mental harness includes this visage-narrowing accoutrement it is difficult to understand why the billboards scattered about town have not indicated to these censors the trend of the popular-priced theaters. Do not the titles of the pieces presented indicate the truth of the situation? What may one suppose is the character of such plays as "Her First False Step", "Dealers in White Women", "Why Women Sin", "Queen of the White Slaves" and "New York by Night"?

"Dangers of Working Girls", a piece of this type which I saw at the American, might easily



*"Comstockians wear blinders
that shut from their view
everything East and West
of Broadway"*

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be set down as one of the worst of the "Dangers of Working Girls." The principal figure in the play was Doctor Sakea, whose profession was Mrs. Warren's and whose assistants were Chinamen hired to lure maidens into a place of evil resort. The production was full of such lines as "Don't spoil her beauty; it means money to us" and "Ah! More pretty girls for the master's cage", while its principal situation was the auctioning of a number of half-dressed women to the highest bidder. For this scene a crowd of bestial degenerates attracted by the posters waited with gloating eyes and open jaws. There was no sugar-coating over the pill—no bright dialogue, no philosophy, no hint at a "moral lesson." It was simply a ghastly, hideous, degrading appeal to everything that is vile and loathsome in the under side of human nature.

The financial success of such pieces as these seems to decide once for all the question as to whether public taste influences the drama or the drama public taste. With clean and clever plays a stone's throw away, at prices by no

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means prohibitive, no one need attend such performances as that I have described unless he really delights in that form of entertainment. I have always insisted that nothing is more immoral than bad art, and, this being true, the influence of the popular-priced theater appears to be a very grave subject, indeed. The people who go to such places of amusement have so little pleasure in their lives that it would seem a pity to take away whatever they may crave, yet it is not improbable that these very people might be inclined toward an appreciation of better things in the playhouse. We who object to the description of crime and violence in the daily papers certainly may be expected to find evil in its depiction on the stage; we who fear the discussion of delicate topics before audiences of cultured men and women can find nothing to excuse morbid emphasis upon distressing scenes before ignorant and impressionable boys and girls. Whether or not they really believe that such plays reflect life, whether or not they are directly influenced, there certainly can be

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nothing beneficial to them in constant observation of coarse humor, silly pathos, and a distorted code of conduct. I wonder if there is any method by which these play-goers can be made to understand that cleverness is not incompatible with entertainment nor good drama with interest.

THE SMART SET ON THE STAGE

Wherein the author considers comedies of manners, and players who succeed illy in living up to them.

“**T**HE theater has its own aristocracy”, declares the author of a book about families that, generation after generation, have given actors to that institution in America. It is not of “its own aristocracy” that I intend writing, but of the aristocracy it mimics. When I speak of “The Smart Set on the Stage”, the reference is to those men and women who trail their cigarette smoke and their gowns through the modern society play.

There are fashions in drama, just as there are in dresses, and managerial modistes begin to sense a return to favor of the tea cup comedy. Fifteen years ago, during an era of romance, the tinsmith superceded the tailor. A decade later, “guns” were more worn than girdles, and

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the prevailing mode in millinery was the Mexican sombrero, with a leather belt in place of a band. The hero of a play was the male who could shoot straightest. Now, once again, the hero is the gentleman who can successfully balance, at one and the same time, a punch glass, a plate of biscuits, and the arguments for and against running away with his friend's wife. Within the past few months we have had such examples of their school as "Electricity", "Smith", "The Gamblers", "Nobody's Widow", "Getting a Polish" and "We Can't Be as Bad as All That", the last by that inveterate dramatizer of the social whirl, Henry Arthur Jones. With Jones in his heaven, all's right with the whirl'd!

Nor do these six compose a complete list. Mary Garden is still "wallowing", and surely Salome belonged to one of the best families of the East! Lady Macbeth and her husband—not the Macbeths who make lamp chimneys; O, dear no!—must have been in the blue book of their day. We met some very nice people with Mary Magdalene, too, and Prince Bellidor, in

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"Sister Beatrice", behaved like one of the idle rich, but inasmuch as their conduct in society, ancient or modern, was not the theme of the works in which they appeared I shall omit further mention of these works.

The rich we have always with us. That is why Thackeray is more popular than Dickens, and that is why the smart set has been paraded theatrically since Thespis took the first wagon show on a tour of Greece. We are a lot of Pomonas—particularly the women among us—and we cannot help revelling in the doings of dignitaries whose place in life, but for fear of making this article sound railroad-y, I should describe as an elevated station. The more humble we are the greater the craving and the delight. Lizzie Brown, who measures ribbon behind a counter from breakfast 'til dinner, naturally extracts infinite pleasure from spending her evenings with only a row of footlights between herself and wonderful beings who toil not and spin nothing but yarns. That is almost like moving in the best circles oneself; it is being

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transported to a world millions of miles from the brass tracks in the ribbon counter. Miss Brown half believes herself a great lady by morning, as you may judge by her manner if you go to her for a yard of baby blue. Everyone of us has something of Lizzie Brown in his or her make-up. The same instinct that moves us to marry our daughter to the Prince of This or the Duke of That causes us to remember "East Lynne" when we have forgotten "Hazel Kirke."

Most of us outside the charmed circle have ideas of good society quite as exaggerated as the Biblical idea of Paradise. We may not fancy that fashionables go about with crowns of light and golden harps, but we do insist that on the stage they behave as little as possible like ordinary human beings.

That is why it is so difficult to write society plays. If the characters you create do not feel and think normally they become puppets, and if they do you are accused at once of having failed to suggest smartness. One night I stood in the lobby of the Criterion Theater as the au-

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dience came out after having seen "Her Great Match." A woman who passed me remarked: "I think it was charming, but that man didn't make love at all like a Prince." Just what are the peculiarities of royal love-making the lady didn't explain, and the idiosyncracies that got the only prince I ever knew into jail had to do, not with the *way* he courted, but with the number of times. In any event, it was proved afterward that my friend really was descended from a respectable veterinary surgeon, which disqualifies me as an authority on the subject. When I mentioned the matter to him, Mr. Fitch observed that he had been quite chummy with a prince or two, and that, while he never actually had seen them make love, he judged from their consorts that their powers of amatory expression were quite ordinary. "However", quoth Mr. Fitch, "you can't expect the public to believe *that*."

It used to be a pretty general impression that nobody who had more than twenty thousand a year ever indulged in a show of emotion. I say



*"The peculiarities of royal
love-making"*

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"nobody", although, of course, you are aware that wealthy parents in society plays always are exceptions to the rule of good breeding. Otherwise, imperturbability of the John Drew kind was supposed to be a trade mark of culture blown in the bottle. Common folk might laugh or cry under stress of circumstances, but the souls of the elect were sheathed in ice. The approved manner of translating a crisis into the dialogue of the drawing room was something like this:

Lord Dash: Good afternoon! Rippin' weather, isn't it? (Bus. of stroking mustache.) I've a bit of disagreeable news for you.

Lady Blank: Indeed? Will you have a cup of tea, Lord Dash? What is it?

Lord Dash: No, thank you; I never take tea. Your eldest son, havin' been detected in an act of forgery, has just blown out his bally brains.

Lady Blank: Poor lad! He was always impulsive! I hope he isn't seriously hurt, Lord Dash? Dead? Ah! Now you really must let me pour you a cup of tea.

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Having to combat that sort of folly was the thing that made it hard to write a society play. It was like dramatizing a novel and trying to create a heroine who would agree with the ten thousand notions of her cherished by the ten thousand readers of the book. Gradually, as the mirror held up to nature has become more nearly true, we have grown to understand that, in the grip of a great joy or grief, a nobleman behaves very much like a bricklayer; sometimes a trifle better, and sometimes, as in the case of the bazaar disaster in Paris, a good deal worse.

One fact not universally understood by persons who criticize the smart set on the stage is that there are many kinds of society. The group depicted in "Gallops" or "Lord and Lady Algy" is antipodally different from that shown in "The Way of the World" or "His House in Order." The self-made men of "The Pit" and "The Lion and the Mouse" are miles removed from the aristocrats of "The Idler" or "A Royal Family." The gambling males and cigarette-smoking females of "The Walls of Jericho" and "The

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House of Mirth" have very little in common with the conservatives of "The Hypocrites" and "The Duke of Killicrankie." All society looks alike to the assistant dramatic editor, however, and, if some girl delivers herself of a slang phrase, he is quick to realize that the playwright who created her can know nothing of good form.

The man who deals with fashionables on the stage fingers a pianoforte with a single octave. More than half of the conditions that produce sentiment and sensation in Harlem never get as far down town as Fifth Avenue. That is why most drawing room dramas are worked out with the same characters and about the same stories. Someone has said that there do not exist more than three plots for farce; certainly, not more than ten have been used in society plays. Of these, the favorite is the tale of the good-for-nothing gentleman who goes away with the wife of the studious or hard-working hero. Sometimes, he is only *about* to go away with this malcontent when the hero aforesaid finds her at mid-

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night in the "rooms" of his rival. The places in which a woman is found at midnight are always "rooms"; never, by any chance, chambers, or apartments, or a flat. Occasionally, the lady, or the gentleman, or both, are quite innocent of wrong-doing. The lady may have come to save the reputation of another lady, or to prepare a rarebit, but when the husband has tracked her by the fan that years of Wilde have not taught such callers to hide with them, he gets into a towering rage and does not get out again until the end of the fourth act. Henry Arthur Jones calls tea the prop of our drama. I disagree with him. It is the careless lady with a *penchant* for nocturnal visits who makes the theater possible in England and America. You don't believe it? Well, some of the comedies produced in New York during one season in which this incident figured were "Popularity", "Man and His Angel", "The Chorus Lady", "The Three of Us", "The House of Mirth", "Daughters of Men", "The Straight Road", and "All-of-a-Sudden Peggy." James M. Barrie



*"The lady may have come to
prepare a rarebit"*

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satirized the situation in "Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire", and then employed it seriously for his most effective scene.

Of course, one or two of the pieces in the list given do not come strictly under the head of drawing room drama, but the fact remains that a majority of the young women who go calling on the stroke of twelve dive into indiscretion under Marcel waves. The coveting of his neighbor's wife is supposed to be a specialty of the society man, and thus it is that so many comedies of manors are founded on that theme. The marriage of convenience is much used in plays of this type, too, as well as the *mesalliance* that afterward turns out well. Divorce is coming more and more into vogue as a subject. Then there are satires in which the follies of the smart set are held up to ridicule and execration; comedies in which the vulgarisms of a very rich man, usually an American and father of the heroine, are contrasted favorably with the culture of the aristocracy of Europe; and plays in which the wronged girl figures, wearing a wan expression

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and a becoming black dress. Add to these varieties that class of composition in which society is only the background for contests in politics, diplomacy, business, or detective work, and we have pretty well come to the end of our possibilities.

Whatever else happens in the society play, there always is a dance at which the juvenile lovers flirt, and the serious people discuss such tragic things as ruin and sudden death, while an orchestra "off at R." fiddles through "Love's Dream After the Ball." Next to elopements, ruin and sudden death are the chief necessities of the society play. Whenever a gentleman gets on the wrong side of the market, or has the misfortune to possess a wife whose lover is the hero of the piece, instead of the villain, he promptly kills himself. After reading a succession of dramas like "The Climbers" and "The Moth and the Flame" one is amazed to discover that in the United States only about one hundredth of one per cent. of the population cashes in its checks self-endorsed.

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If you have followed so far, patient peruser, you probably will join me in the conclusion that the society play is nothing on earth but melodrama in a frock coat. The effectiveness of the play depends upon the completeness of the disguise; with the dramatic tailor rests the question whether you sniff or snuffle. Undraped melodrama treating of fashionable folk is the funniest entertainment in the world, excepting "Charley's Aunt." Fine evenings, when my brain cells were closed for repairs and I was weary of musical comedy, I used to go over to Eighth Avenue and see "Why Women Sin" and "A Working Girl's Wrongs." I found that our class is responsible alike for the sins and the wrongs; that gentility is a thing to move virtuous burglars, comic green grocers and other honest men and women to a passion of righteous indignation. "I was ne'er so thrummed since I was gentleman", wrote Thomas Dekker in an ancient comedy of unprintable title, and it is my opinion that he penned the line after seeing his kind through the astigmatic glasses of Theodore

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Kremer. Small wonder, indeed! On Eighth Avenue, in the old days, everyone sufficiently prosperous to be opposed to an income tax wore a silk hat and lived in a "mansion." Apparently "mansions" were not places in which privacy was to be had, since the Eighth Avenue millionaire invariably came out into the street when he wanted to exhibit "the papers." Eighth Avenue millionaires always were white-haired, drank cold tea and soda, plotted "dirty work", and had closets so full of skeletons that any physician might have mistaken them for anatomical museums. "Little children", I used to say to the progeny of a friend of mine, "when you grow up be careful not to be an Eighth Avenue millionaire."

The smart set have rather a hard time of it on any stage, and, for that matter, so does the author who dallies with the subject. If there is one thing in which the dramatic *grand monde* are lucky it is their servants. Nowhere else under the blue canopy of heaven are such perfectly trained menials as one sees through the pros-



"Why women sin"

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cenium arch. They would make the fortune of any of those agencies misnamed "intelligence bureaus."

I already have commented on the difficulties of the man who writes drawing room drama. I have said that, if he has a stirring story to tell, he must disguise it. On the other hand, if it be his ambition to compose comedies of manners, like "The Liars", he must master the very fine art of interesting an audience for two hours without actually doing anything; of making a vacuum shimmer. The people in such society plays must talk like ordinary people who have been seeing society plays. Their dialogue must be cynical and clever, and just a bit what a witty Frenchman called "*sans chemise*." A society play excellently exemplifies the truth of the adage: "Nothing *risque*; nothing gained." Should the conversation be truly bright the critics may be counted upon to observe that real people never talk that way; but it is better to beard the critics than to bore the audience. If I may add to a line from "Clothes": "Hell and

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the stage drawing room are two places where there are no stupid people."

It is no easy matter for the average playwright to reproduce the atmosphere of Fifth Avenue. Many of the nabobs one glimpses in the theatre fall about three hundred and sixty short of the "four hundred." Every second comedy of manners we see is a comedy of very bad manners. Men born with gold spoons in their mouths find it hard to articulate, and few of our fashionable families produce dramatists who "speak in a voice that fills the nation." Only the most successful of the craft get an opportunity to study society at first hand. Perhaps that is fortunate. "The drawback to realism", says Wilton Lackaye, "is the fate of the realist. If he goes into the slums he becomes base; if he goes into society he becomes soprano." The average social lion being the sort of man one could push over, we ought to be glad of the barrier between the pen, which only writes, and money, which talks. Vigor and virility are more essential to good drama than absolutely

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faithful atmosphere. All other things being equal, the individual who would make the best pugilist would make the best playwright.

A good many of our society plays are marred by *gaucheries* of a serious nature. Glance over your mental list of tea-cup pieces. Clyde Fitch, who rarely offended in this respect, had one woman giving orders to the servants of another woman in "The Truth." Jack Neville, in the Elsie de Wolfe performance of "The Way of the World", whistled merrily while waiting in her parlor for his hostess. True, he didn't whistle very noisily, but that palliation only makes one think of the retort courteous supposed to have been made by a well-bred woman after she had complained of a gentleman who whistled in her ball room. "It was very low", plead the gentleman. "It *was*", answered the lady; "*very* low."

Cynthia, in the comedy of that name, received her husband while the hairdresser and the manicure were employed with her. Dick Crawford, in "Caught in the Rain", tips a servant

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in the home of his friend, Mr. Mason. Everybody who visits Montgomery Brewster in the first act of "Brewster's Millions" comments most vulgarly on that hero's newly acquired wealth. Richard Burbank in "Clothes" mistakes Miss Sherwood's piano for a hat rack, while that lady permits herself to be led away from a dance without bidding farewell to her hostess. In "The House of Mirth", a sandless-souled hero, named Lawrence Selden, literally thrust himself past a protesting servant and into the rooms of Augustus Trenor. The young woman impersonated by Edna May in "The Catch of the Season" was given tiffen consisting of a hunk of bread an inch thick and tea in a cup that bore all the ear-marks of belonging to that family of unbreakable things that are used in the second cabin of ocean liners. These, of course, are "trifles light as air", but what shall be said of Charles Richman in dress clothes and light boots in "Mrs. Dane's Defence", of Margaret Dale in décolleté and walking hat in "Delancy", and of Mrs. Fiske's laying her handkerchief on

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the luncheon table in "Becky Sharp?" Above all, what shall be said of the gentleman in "The Triangle" who stabbed his better half with a carving knife at dinner. I may be ignorant of what I seek to teach and quite wrong about these other *faux pas*, but *that* certainly cannot be condemned too forcibly. It simply isn't done!

"Popularity", George Cohan's play that afterward became "The Man Who Owns Broadway", was a perfect mine of ill breeding. In the first place, the Fuller drawing room, as shown, was a flaring red, with a piano on which the manufacturer's name was painted in letters two inches high. During the evening there were several callers, whom the Fullers left quite alone for a period of fifteen minutes. The butler atoned for this rudeness by shaking hands with one of the guests, a young gentleman unfortunately crossed in love, and expressing sympathy for him. The young gentleman said he was much obliged. The climax of this singular exhibition was reached when a "matinee idol", dropping in without invitation on Papa Fuller, whom he

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had never met, lit a cigar, instructed the sympathetic butler to bring him spirituous liquor, and told his host a few things about gentlemen in general and the host himself in particular.

The familiarity of the butler in "Popularity" was as nothing to the behavior of the servants in "Forty-five Minutes From Broadway", where several menials seemed to subscribe heartily to Paul Blouet's dictum that "America is a country in which every man is as good as his neighbor and a damned sight better." The mother in the noisy farce of "Julie Bonbon" who objected to having her son marry a milliner might have improved her own manners in any millinery shop on Fifth Avenue. A chambermaid in "Susan in Search of a Husband" introduced to each other two guests of her hotel; Vida Phillimore in "The New York Idea" received in her boudoir a nobleman who had been presented to her only the day before; Mrs. O'Mara addressed her daughter and ignored the visitor who was chatting with her in "All-of-a-Sudden Peggy." The reception room revealed in "The Daughters of



"It simply isn't done!"

THE SMART SET ON THE STAGE

Men" looked like the interior of a jewel box, and served as the abiding place of a wonderful collection of amusingly stiff-backed men and women, representing the smart set as, at that time, it was imagined by Charles Klein.

Fortunately, errors of taste in staging society plays become fewer and less conspicuous every day. They are practically obsolete now in theaters like the Empire, the Lyceum, the Hudson, and the Belasco. With them has gone the time in which every fashionable apartment was furnished in exactly the same way and had doors in exactly the same place. The producer who "dresses" a stage today buys precisely as though he had a commission to "dress" the home of a wealthy and intelligent client. Under these circumstances, it is particularly fortunate that the comedy of manners and the drama of the drawing room have come to stay. Cultured people are pleasant companions in everyday life, and doubly pleasant when they have been idealized and super-refined for library or theater. We may be glad of the evident fact that plays may

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come and plays may go, but the society play goes
on forever.

